

## Code against terrorism

THE WAR against terrorism will top the agenda of a three-day, 22-nation Arab League conference of interior ministers opening in Tunis today, reports Jallal Halawi from the Tunisian capital, Egypt, whose delegation is led by Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi. He has submitted a "code of conduct" in the conference, calling for greater inter-Arab cooperation in combating terrorism and organized crime in general.

The Egyptian document proposes that Arab states exchange information about the activities, leaders, members, hideouts, training areas, financing and weaponry of terrorist organizations, along with the "exchange of scientific and technological experience" relevant to the war against terrorism.

All member-states of the Arab League would also be required not to provide any type of assistance to terrorists, whether in the form of financing, training, arming or allowing militants to cross national borders.

## Good hands

SAUDI Crown Prince Abdullah took temporary charge of the government this week to allow time for the ailing Saudi Monarch King Fahd to recuperate from his illness. Crown Prince Abdullah, also in his 70s, has been effectively running the government since Fahd fell ill in November. He said on Monday he will be consulting King Fahd on state matters whenever the need arises.

The US State Department said it believed Saudi Arabia was in good hands. Observers discounted any major shifts in Saudi domestic and foreign policies, but pointed out the difference in the style of governance between the "cosmopolitan King Fahd and the traditionalist Crown Prince."

## Feud cools

ETHIOPIAN Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin announced yesterday that Yemen and Eritrea were moving towards a peaceful settlement of their dispute over three Red Sea islands. After talks with Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, Mesfin said he received an encouraging reaction to a draft agreement incorporating the views of the two countries.

Diplomatic sources told The AP news agency that the agreement called for an immediate withdrawal of Eritrean forces from the island of Greater Hanish to be followed by negotiations on the status of the other two islands, Zugar and Lesser Hanish, presently under Yemeni control.

Eritrea seized the island of Greater Hanish on 18 December sparking a crisis between the two states.

## Inner secrets

ISRAELI Prime Minister Shimon Peres yesterday held the first meeting of his inner security cabinet, but postponed a decision to require the 10 ministers to sign a secrecy oath. The regulation would impose a jail sentence of up to three years on ministers who reveal information endangering national security.

Israel radio reported that the meeting rejected claims for damages filed by Palestinians hurt by Israeli security forces during the 1987-1994 uprising in the Occupied Territories, and discussed security problems at the state airline El-Al.

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# Cabinet sworn in today

**The key portfolios of foreign affairs, Interior and defence will not change hands in Kamal El-Ganzouri's new cabinet. Nevin Khalil reports**

Prime Minister-designate Kamal El-Ganzouri worked until late last night on forming a new cabinet to replace the administration of Atef Sidki, who resigned 24 hours earlier, after a record nine years in office.

Following an hour-long meeting with President Hosni Mubarak, Ganzouri, deputy prime minister for the past nine years, and also minister of planning, announced that "between seven and nine" new faces would join the cabinet.

Ganzouri, 63, said that the key portfolios of defence, foreign affairs and the interior would remain in the same hands — those of Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, Amr Moussa and Hassan El-Alfi. There would, however, be changes in the economic portfolios such as finance, economy and international cooperation, he said.

Following his meeting with the president, Ganzouri headed to the cabinet's headquarters where he began a series of meetings with members of his new government. As *Al-Ahram Weekly* went to print yesterday evening, the reappointment of twelve other members of the outgoing cabinet had been confirmed.

They are: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture, Youssef Wah, Education Minister Hossam Kamel Bahaddin, Justice Minister Farouk Seif El-Nasr, Public Business Sector Minister Atef Ebaid, Energy Minister Maher Abaza, Culture Minister Farouk Hosni, Tourism Minister Mamduh El-Beltagi, Social Affairs Minister Anas Osman, Minister of State for Parliamentary Af-



fairs Kamal El-Shazli, Transport Minister Sohail Metwally and Local Administration Minister Mahmoud El-Sherif.

According to Ganzouri, the new cabinet is to be sworn in today by President Mubarak.

Ganzouri, one of the architects of the economic reform programme, was asked by President Mubarak on Tuesday night to form a new cabinet "to lead the nation into the 21st century."

"During the past years, the nation has faced immense challenges as a result of the successive changes in the Middle East and throughout the world," Mubarak wrote in the letter asking Ganzouri to head the new administration. "It was imperative to face those

escalating challenges with a comprehensive vision and a well-studied programme, based on scientific planning, the realisation of a national consensus on our objectives and the mobilisation of all human and material resources to serve those objectives."

To achieve these targets, Mubarak wrote, "a comprehensive programme of economic reform was prepared, taking into account our social and economic conditions and our national priorities." An emphasis was placed on increasing production, launching new projects, creating new job opportunities, encouraging private enterprise, boosting exports, cutting the deficit in the state budget and realising a surplus in the balance of pay-

ments, Mubarak continued. And, while those objectives were pursued, the infrastructure and means of production were renovated and the nation's defensive ability was upgraded.

Mubarak said the outgoing cabinet had made remarkable achievements in planning and executing economic reform, "while our struggling people proved that they have the highest sense of responsibility and great readiness to make sacrifices for the supreme national interest."

Describing the first phase of economic reform as highly successful, Mubarak nevertheless urged that "we have to build on this success and carry reform into a new phase, focusing on further increasing production,

creating new job opportunities at a faster pace, launching production and public service projects throughout Egypt, and raising the level of basic services, particularly in education, health and culture, without adding to the burdens of low-income groups."

Running parallel to this new phase of economic reform, a long-term vision of Egypt in the 21st century should be evolved, anticipating major scientific and technological advances as well as challenges resulting from the collapse of the old world order, Mubarak wrote.

Affirming his confidence in Ganzouri's "efficiency, wide experience, sound judgement and high abilities," Mubarak formally entrusted him with forming a new cabinet "which is able to carry on the process of reform, development and progress."

This new cabinet, Mubarak added in his letter, "should build on the achievements already made, so that we can take Egyptian society to new horizons within the framework outlined in my speech to the People's Assembly on 16 December."

The president concluded his letter by affirming: "I have great confidence that you and your colleagues will do your utmost to realise these objectives and respond to the people's aspirations for further growth and progress."

Outgoing Prime Minister Atef Sidki had headed three cabinets in succession, the first formed in November 1986, the second in October 1987 and the third in October 1993. (see p.2)



photo: Salah Ibrahim

## Ghali's shuttle diplomacy

UN SECRETARY-General Boutros Ghali, currently on a visit to Cairo, was met by Foreign Minister Amr Moussa yesterday. Their talks, reports Inas Nour, covered the peace process in Bosnia, UN sanctions against Libya over the 1988 Lockerbie plane bombing, the Yemen-Eritrea dispute over Red Sea islands of Hanish, the deteriorating humanitarian conditions in Iraq, political uncertainty in Somalia, and the Western Saharan conflict.

Moussa and the UN secretary-general also discussed plans for UN reform, especially those pertaining to expanding and diversifying the composition of the UN Security Council and increasing the number of permanent members in the Council. Egypt has just begun a two-year term as a non-permanent Council member.

Earlier on Tuesday, Ghali was met by President Hosni Mubarak. The UN secretary-general briefed the president on the results of his trip to Asmara and Sana'a. Boutros Ghali's shuttle diplomacy, coupled with the peace efforts of the Ethiopian Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin, has eased tensions between Yemen and Eritrea.

Ghali also met yesterday with Arab League secretary-general, Esmael Abdel-Meguid. A meeting between the UN and regional organisations such as the Arab League and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) is scheduled for the second half of February in New York, the UN secretary-general said. Ghali yesterday inaugurated a UN photo exhibition organised by Al-Ahram in the lobby of its downtown offices. He was accompanied by Al-Ahram General Manager Ali Ghoneim, and the director of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, Abdel-Moneim Said (photo left). The Centre later hosted a seminar where Ghali delivered a lecture on UN reform and the post-Cold War international affairs, which was succeeded by an open discussion. (see UN special, p.7)

## Intentions tested in Maryland

Syrians and Israelis remained optimistic, as Christopher prepared to visit the region

Syria and Israel were resuming their peace negotiations at a Maryland retreat yesterday as a prelude to a new trip to the Middle East by US Secretary of State Warren Christopher.

The talks are aimed at securing a peace treaty between the Middle Eastern neighbours based on Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Golan Heights, agreement on security arrangements along the common border and the normalisation of relations.

Negotiators from the two countries, together with Amer-

ican mediators, met for three days last week at the Wye conference centre near Queenstown, Maryland, and had further exchanges at the weekend in the Washington area.

"We're encouraged by what we saw and we're encouraged that everybody is coming back," State Department spokesman Glynn Davies said Tuesday. "We look forward to further progress." Why the State Department is encouraged was not specified, and no further details were given. News media are barred from the ve-

ue of the talks.

Israeli negotiator Itamar Ra-

binoth said that a mutually

acceptable deal could still be

worked out, although the talks

were not without difficulties.

"I think Syria is interested," he

said. He added that Christopher's trip could have a significant impact on the negotiations, which have continued

sporadically for more than four years.

Christopher is planning to

leave for the Middle East on

Monday, stopping first in Paris

for a conference of nations as-

(see p.4)

sisting the Palestinian Authority in running the self-rule areas in Gaza and the West Bank.

Damascus Radio, in a commentary on Tuesday, said Syria was committed to a "full peace" in exchange for a total Israeli withdrawal. It said that the Syrian position imposes a great responsibility on Israel to accelerate the negotiations.

"Good intentions only do not make peace, if they are not accompanied by serious steps on the ground," the broadcast said.

(see p.4)

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## 'Out of our hands'

SAMIHA Khalil is challenging PLO leader Yasser Arafat for the presidency of the Palestinian Interim Self-Governing Authority. In an exclusive interview with Graham Usher, the full text of which appears on page four of this issue, she argues that though it is good to see the Israeli army leave Gaza and the West Bank "all this is by order of the Israelis. It is out of our hands." I am standing, she says, because the Oslo-based peace process will not lead to Palestinian sovereignty.

Khalil believes she will win support from those Palestinians

whose situation has worsened with the peace process, namely the families of the prisoners, the families of the martyrs. "I seek to represent the dispossessed of our society," she says.

# Parliament votes for immunity

The new People's Assembly, acting with surprising speed, turned down a Justice Ministry request to lift the parliamentary immunity of five of its members. **Gamal Essam El-Din** reports

At its first sitting on Saturday, the new People's Assembly debated, and then rejected, a request by Justice Minister Farouk Seif El-Nasr to strip five of its members of their parliamentary immunity so that they could be investigated — four for alleged financial irregularities and the fifth for suspected murder. But the Assembly, acting on the recommendation of its constitutional and legislative committee, allowed the five deputies to testify before prosecution officials. Parliamentary rules require that the Assembly's permission be sought before MPs can answer prosecution questions.

Referring to the four accused of financial malpractice, committee chairman Mohamed Moussa said that investigating the misuse of public funds usually takes a long time, up to three or four years. "A deputy could not be left without immunity for such a long time... But if the prosecution decides to put them on trial, we can lift their immunity in a minute. We are not using immunity to protect anyone," he insisted.

The four who are suspected of misappropriating public funds are Tawfiq Abdou Ismail, Khaled Hamed Mahmoud, Mahmoud Azzam and Ibrahim Aglan. The fifth, who is a suspect in the investigation of the murder of two men during the recent parliamentary elections, is Ahmed Fouad Abaza.

The case of the four came to public attention in August, when the Administrative Control Authority submitted a report to the prosecutor general claiming that a group of businessmen, including Mahmoud Azzam, a private contractor, Khaled Mohamed Mahmoud, the son of a former minister of local administration, Yassin Abdel-Fattah Aglan, a Beheira governorate businessman, and Mohamed Kamel Mustafa Elba, a public contractor, used forged documents to obtain large loans from the Commercial Bank of Daqahliya and Al-Nil Bank without collateral.

Azzam's wife, Aleya El-Ayyouti, is vice-president of Al-Nil Bank. According to the report, Azzam took advantage of his wife's position to obtain loans amounting to LE179 million without notifying the bank's board of directors or listing the loans in the bank's books.

The report alleged that Tawfiq Abdou Ismail, chairman of the outgoing Assembly's plan and budget committee (also re-elected for this session) and chairman of the Commercial Bank of Daqahliya, and Ibrahim Aglan, a member of the bank's board, provided Yassin Aglan, Ibrahim's brother, with more than LE200 million in loans, also without collateral and against the payment of hefty commissions.

The prosecutor sent the Administrative Control Authority's report to the outgoing Assembly and also requested the Central Bank of Egypt to investigate the actions of the two banks. The outgoing Assembly reacted by lifting the immunity of Azzam, Mahmoud and Ismail, who were deputies at the time. In the recent parliamentary elections, these three, plus Ibrahim Aglan, managed to win seats in the new Assembly. After taking the constitutional oath, they asked for the Assembly's permission to testify before prosecution officials.

But on 17 December, the minister of justice, acting on a request by the prosecutor general, sent a report to the new Assembly requesting that the four deputies be stripped of their immunity. With surprising speed, Assembly Speaker Ahmed Fahmi Sourou referred the minister's report to the Assembly's legislative and constitutional committee on the same day. And it was put on the agenda of the Assembly's first sitting last Saturday, 30 December.

Zakaria Azmi, MP for Cairo's Al-Zaitoun district and chief of the presidential staff, triggered a heated debate when he criticised the legislative and constitutional committee's report and said it did not provide convincing reasons for its refusal to lift the four deputies' immunity. He predicted that their immunity would have to be lifted eventually. Committee chairman Moussa retorted that one of the four, Ismail, had travelled abroad more than once during the past three months without any objection from the prosecution.

Khaled Mahmoud, another of the four, objected to the fact that Azmi "seemed that our immunity will be lifted in the end, although the prosecutor has stated more than once that the report did not amount to a direct accusation against us. Unless", Mahmoud added, "Azmi knows something which we don't know". Azmi denied being in the possession of secret information.

Sameh Ashour, a Nasserist deputy, triggered another heated debate when he accused the committee, of which he is a member, of devoting greater attention to the four deputies' request to testify before prosecution officials than to the request for the removal of their immunity. "This could make it easy for certain people to cover up their activities", Ashour said. Angered by these words, Tawfiq Abdou Ismail responded that neither he nor the three others "needed the protection of parliamentary immunity because we have full confidence in the justice system". He added that "the people demonstrated their support for us in the recent elections."

Pointing out that the four had requested the Assembly's permission to testify before prosecution officials, Ismail charged that certain authorities — an allusion to the Administrative Control Authority — had acted against Egypt's interest by defaming the good names of honourable people.

The Assembly, after authorising the four to testify before prosecution officials, then debated another report by its legislative and constitutional committee on the case of Ahmed Fouad Abaza, MP for the Sharqia district of Abu Hammad. The committee also turned down the justice minister's request to strip him of his parliamentary immunity on the grounds that the request was not backed by documents on the case filed against Abaza, as required by the Assembly's regulations. The committee authorised Abaza to testify before prosecution officials.

Yassir Serageldin, leader of the Wafd Party's parliamentary group, backed the committee's report, but Abdel-Ahad Gammal, chairman of the Assembly's proposals and complaints committee, objected to it. He said that the constitution intended parliamentary immunity as a protection for MPs in the discharge of their parliamentary duties. Abaza however, "was caught red-handed and a police order was issued remanding him in custody for 15 days".

According to the prosecutor's report, Abaza was caught on 7 December inside his car, with an automatic rifle and 24 bullets, inciting his supporters to interfere in the vote-counting process. Earlier, the report said, Abaza was suspected of shooting and killing two people, Ahmed Mohamed Youssef and Ahmed Mohamed Ahmed, in a polling station. He was also said to have fired bullets at a number of ballot boxes in an attempt to have the votes inside invalidated.

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Mubarak, in a press conference, announces his decision to charge El-Ganzouri with forming a new cabinet

Sidiqi submitting his government's resignation to Mubarak

Sidiqi (r) and El-Ganzouri (l) at Sidiqi's cabinet's final session

A memorial photo of the outgoing cabinet

## Forging ahead

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak announced at a hastily-arranged news conference Tuesday night, that he had designated Deputy Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri to form a new cabinet, replacing the administration of Atef Sidiqi. While stressing that the move did not signal a change in state policy, Mubarak said the task of the new cabinet would be to lead the nation into the 21st century. "I want

to give a push to national action in various spheres", he said. "There are certain objectives which any cabinet, whether the outgoing cabinet or the new cabinet, must pursue."

Asked whether Sidiqi's resignation meant a change in state policy, Mubarak said: "Our policy will never change." The government's primary target, he continued, was to alleviate the economic burdens of low-income groups and raise their

standard of living. "Cabinets may change but our objectives do not. The task of the new cabinet is to activate this process and give it a push." He told reporters that economic reform and privatisation would continue, describing them as "unavoidable". Asked whether he planned to appoint a vice-president, Mubarak replied: "God willing."

## Architect of economic reform

AS DEPUTY prime minister and minister of planning, Kamal El-Ganzouri has been one of the architects of the economic reform programme and the shift to a market economy, which was launched in the mid-1980s. Ganzouri, who was designated by President Hosni Mubarak on Tuesday night to form a new cabinet, has led Egyptian negotiators to several rounds of talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), in-

sisting that the reform programme should be tailored to Egypt's national interests. He put up strong opposition to the IMF's demand for the devaluation of the Egyptian pound, and eventually won.

Ganzouri, 63, graduated from Cairo University's Faculty of Agriculture and later travelled to the United States to obtain a doctorate in economics from Michigan University. In the 1970s he was governor of the New Valley

and later Beni Suef governorates, before being appointed as director of the National Planning Institute. He held his first cabinet post, as minister of planning and international cooperation, in 1982, and was elevated to deputy prime minister and minister of planning in 1987.

When he was summoned by Mubarak to form a new cabinet, Ganzouri was busy working on the nation's third five-year economic

development plan, to be launched in 1997. It divides economic reform into three stages: renovating the infrastructure and the instruments of production, which has been achieved in the first and second development plans; financial discipline, which was enforced in the latter half of the second plan; and a massive increase of production, which is the target of the third plan.

## Poll monitors argue their merits

The recent parliamentary elections were monitored by local human rights groups for the first time, but were those groups qualified for the job? **Khaled Dawoud** investigates

Since the birth of the Egyptian human rights movement in 1985, local activists have focused their attention on such occurrences as arbitrary arrests, disappearances, allegations of prison torture and attacks on the freedom of expression. Monitoring parliamentary elections appeared to be outside their scope.

But spurred on by economist Said El-Nagger, chairman of the New Civic Forum, and sociologist professor Saadeddin Ibrahim, director of the Ibn Khaldoun Centre for Development Studies, six human rights groups and research centres decided a few weeks before the 29 November elections to set up an election-watch body.

The team's field work was divided among some of the participating groups, while others contributed legal studies. As election day approached, the various groups issued reports on different kinds of alleged violations. More reports were issued after election day and also after the 6 December second round runoffs. But although the groups were supposed to be working together under the umbrella of the election-watch committee, an informed source, who was involved in the preparations, conceded that there had been a lack of coordination among the groups.

Another human rights research centre director, who asked that his name be withheld, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that his group did not take part in the election-watch committee's work because of the late start in preparations.

"We met for the first time one month before the elections and were asked to prepare for the job," he said. "But it was impossible at such short notice." He added that several people warned that the delay could influence the committee's credibility.

According to this director, the late start meant that field workers were not provided with adequate training — a fact which was readily admitted by the majority of the directors of the participating human rights groups. Most of them, including the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR) which issued its final

100-page report last week, provided their field workers with as little as one day's training.

But the same director said that his reservations were not an attempt to belittle the great efforts that had been made. "I have learned of some cases where human rights activists jeopardised their lives because they insisted on monitoring elections in very hot constituencies", he said.

The reports issued by the human rights groups not only angered the government, but also some opposition forces and independents, particularly the leftist Tagammu Party, which was accused of violations.

The EOHR charged that Tagammu leader Khaled Mubieiddin collaborated with local authorities to ensure his victory and was involved in vote-rigging in his Qalyubia constituency of Kaf Shukr. "That was a scandal", said EOHR Secretary General Negad El-Bora'i. "When the opposition, and not only the government, takes part in vote-rigging, it means there is a big problem with the whole system."

But other human rights activists questioned the credibility of the EOHR itself, with one of them claiming that the group amounted to little more than a branch of the Nasserist Party. This claim, he said, was

corroborated by the fact that Nasserists packed a recent EOHR general assembly, convened to elect a new board for the organisation with supporters. Many of these supporters had no human rights interests.

Bora'i, a former member of the Nasserist Party's political bureau, rejected this accusation, insisting that he was a "liberal".

Hisham Mubarak, director of the Human Rights Legal Centre, one of the groups involved in the committee, conceded that Mohameddin's case could have been blown out of proportion, particularly if it was compared to violations committed by National Democratic Party candidates and independents. "We should take the general context into consideration when we prepare our reports", he warned.

Mubarak described the election-watch experiment as "very useful", first because it set a precedent, and also because it had produced trained groups who would be able to do a better job in similar situations in the future.

He denied that the committee's work had got off to a late start, and said that his own group began preparations well ahead of the elections, issuing six short booklets, and informing voters, candidates, candidate

representatives and polling officials of their rights and duties. He said his centre printed 200,000 copies of those booklets.

Also rejecting the argument that field workers lacked training, Mubarak said that many of them were lawyers and journalists who had a good knowledge of the voting system and who had witnessed previous elections in 1984, 1987 and 1990.

And to minimise the possibility that election monitors might be influenced by their own political affiliations, a special form was prepared with very specific questions about the election process. Each monitor had to manage to complete the form without expressing an opinion, Mubarak said.

Those accusing the human rights groups of doing a bad job are angry because of the large number of violations which were exposed by our reports", he said. "But I actually believe that some of these reports were rather mild, and that more violations could have been revealed."

Proof of the reports' accuracy, he continued, came with administrative court rulings that the election results in over 100 constituencies were null and void because of vote-rigging. The government is contesting the rulings before higher courts.

## Rail chief sacked

Following a series of train crashes, claiming dozens of lives, President Mubarak ordered the dismissal of the chief of the national railway authority. **Dina Ezzat** reports

President Hosni Mubarak on Saturday asked Atef Sidiqi,

then prime minister, to replace the director of the national railway authority, following a series of train crashes that killed more than 60 people in the last two weeks of 1995. There were no casualties, but the collision disrupted railway traffic between Cairo and Aswan for eight hours and cost the railway authority another heavy financial loss.

Then, on 30 December, a passenger train speeding from Al-Minya to Cairo crashed into the rear of another train that was moving in the same direction and on the same tracks.

The driver of the speeding train was killed and 10 passengers were wounded.

In a statement to parliament,

Transport Minister Suleiman Metwally blamed the failure of train drivers to abide by the safety rules and maximum speed regulations.

In the case of the Badrashein tragedy,

Metwally said the driver of the rear train was moving at 140km per hour, violating the maximum speed limit,

and jumped two red lights before

slamming into the stationary train.

Worse, the driver had disconnected an "automatic control device" which would

have forced the train to stop at

the sight of a red light signal.

Despite the advanced technology used by the railway authority, Metwally said, the possibility of human error could not be eradicated completely.

"A quick review of the statistics of train accidents over the last 15 years shows a significant drop in their number", Metwally said. "In 1981, there were 390 accidents, but by 1995 the number had dropped to 89. In other words, there used to be a weekly average of 10 accidents which now has dropped to two."

Metwally seized the opportunity to talk about the large sums of money that have been allocated to upgrading the railway service during the past 15 years.

He promised that, the coming weeks will witness

more extensive training courses

for drivers to improve their skills and greater supervision

to make sure that drivers abide by the authority's regulations.

Immediately after taking office, Mahmoud Marci, the authority's new chairman held a series of meetings with the authority's top officials. "He

wants to pinpoint the problem", an assistant said. "He is determined to introduce a new working system."

But to everybody's dismay, only 24 hours after Marci assumed his new responsibilities, yet another railway accident occurred. A train derailed and some of its cars overturned in adjacent fields as the driver was attempting to halt the train to a siding in Giza. There were no casualties.

And on the first day of 1996, an empty train caught fire at Cairo's main station and the fire brigade was brought in to extinguish the blaze.

And yet these successive accidents have not deterred passengers from using the train service, with 1,600 daily trips covering the country's 26 governorates. During the past few days, Cairo's Ramses Station has been busier and more crowded than usual. People

celebrating the new year or

making plans for Coptic Christmas and the mid-term school holidays have been mass-

booking train tickets to the

governorates of Upper and

Lower Egypt, according to a seeing, suggested that the horrific crashes would not deter people from depending on Egypt's most popular means of long-distance transport.

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# Pride and profit

Employee share ownership programmes may yield positive results, but, say legal and management experts, some problems still exist within the system. Sherine Abdel-Razek reports

For 35 years, at the end of every workday, Gad El-Rab Taha, a driver at a public sector company, used to leave the company car at the garage without even bothering to wash it. But a year after joining the company's Employee Shareholders' Association (ESA), Taha, 55, now checks the car's gas, oil and water supply daily, and covers it before leaving the company garage every afternoon.

"I feel now that it is my own car; that I have a stake in the company. Any breakdown would hold up the company, and in turn affect my profits," he said.

This turnaround in Taha's attitude is shared by all the Egyptian Real Estate Company's (EREC) employees, who now own 95 per cent of the firm. Selling public sector company shares to employee share holding associations is one method of privatisation increasingly gaining ground and bringing about positive results. The system enables employees to be de facto owners of public sector companies by buying stakes in the ESA, which, in turn, purchases shares on behalf of its members. On retirement, the employees sell their stake in the ESA back to the association at market value. A percentage of the ESA's stakes are withheld for new workers who might like to join in the future.

As a result of this system, employees also assume the role of shareholders concerned with boosting production and minimising costs. And, at the end of each year, members of ESAs receive a dual share of company profits, both as shareholders and as employees.

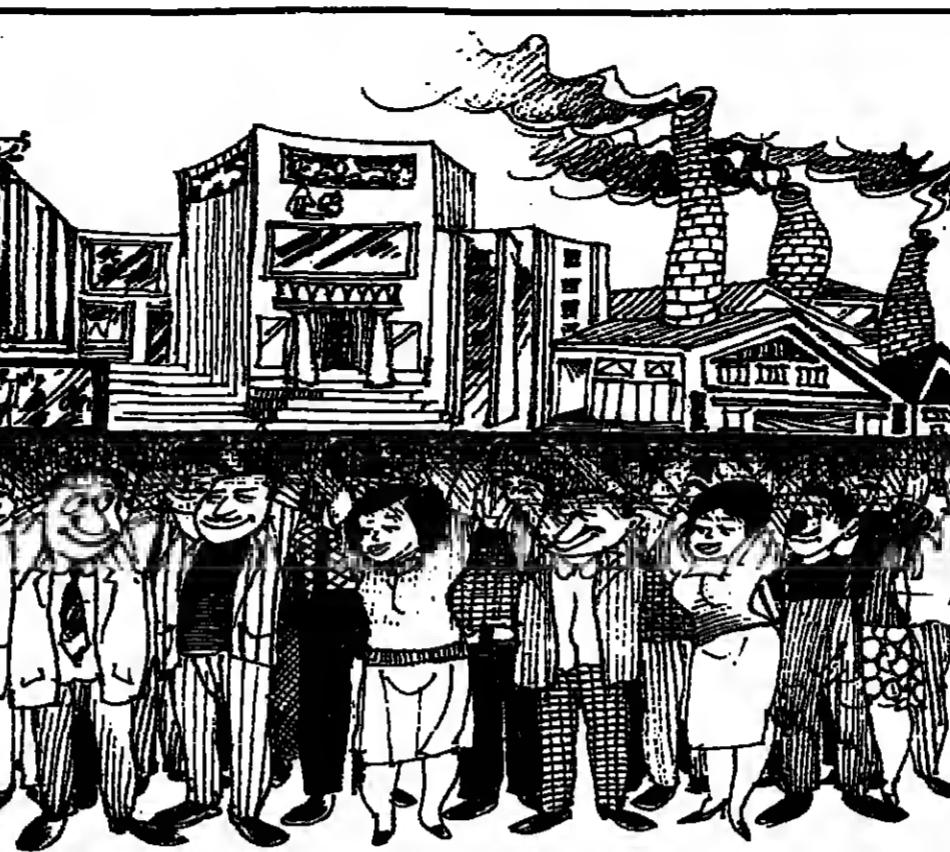
The formation of ESAs was made possible by the Capital Market Law issued in 1992. Legislative Counselor Mahmoud Fahmi, a principal author of the law, pointed out that although ESAs have long existed around the world, it was only with

Law 95 that they took root in Egypt. The law provided a legal umbrella for these associations. In 1986, recalls Fahmi, prior to the law, there were attempts to give employees 30 per cent of the shares of the Alexandria Tire Company, a public sector company in the process of being established. However, such efforts proved futile in the absence of a law, he said.

Since 1992, the number of ESAs registered with the Capital Market Authority has reached 261, and while some have not developed into anything more than plans on paper, others have succeeded in encouraging employee ownership. However, according to Fahmi, even the most active ESAs have been confronted with problems.

One major problem has been providing employees with financing to buy company shares. Various companies have sorted out financing problems individually, using undistributed profits or providing credit lines for employees and deducting instalments from employee paychecks monthly.

However, points out Fahmi, borrowing from the banks is one source of financing which remains limited due to the absence of incentives for the banks to provide such loans. He said that the Unified Companies' Law, which is currently being



drafted, also offers solutions for the financing of employee shares. The law permits employees to pay for the shares in instalments for up to 10 years. It also grants a 20 per cent discount on share prices to employees who are already ESA members, and gives tax incentives to banks to

encourage them to grant loans to ESAs. One of the most prominent examples of ESAs are those formed at the affiliates of the Holding Company for Public Works and Land Reclamation (HCPWLR). ESAs bought 95 per cent of the shares of 10 of the holding company's 11 sub-

sidiaries. However, according to the HCPWLR's Chairman, Abdel-Ghani Hassan, making the ESA work is not an easy task. It usually entails a number of problems including educating workers to their rights and liabilities, raising funds to buy shares, and setting up the framework of the ESA itself.

Among the obstacles, securing financing seems to be the most difficult to overcome. In an attempt to solve this problem the holding company had to intervene, said Hassan. "The holding company itself paid for the shares bought by the ESAs to its affiliates using undistributed profits, and the ESAs will have to pay the loan back in installments over a three-year period at an 8 per cent interest rate," Hassan explained. The first instalment is due in March 1996 and the shares are mortgaged to the holding company until its value is completely paid.

Evaluating the experience, Hassan said that although ESAs are a feasible method of privatising, they can only succeed in profit-making companies, as company profits are one of the major sources of financing the purchase of shares.

Fatma Khattab, of Arthur Andersen's Partnership in Development Project, has been delegated to head the privatisation

unit in the HCPWLR. She agrees that forming ESAs was initially an uphill struggle.

"We had a hard time convincing workers of the idea to establishing ESAs," she said.

At the beginning, Khatib said, the employees did not fully understand the idea, and were intimidated by the prospect of having to pay for the shares. They were even apprehensive about being owners of a company which could, theoretically, generate losses at some point in time.

Khattab pointed out that holding companies and ESAs are working closely together — organising workshops and training courses for employees. These policies proved successful, she asserted, and at times, the results were inspiring.

"In one of HCPWLR's affiliates, membership in its ESA jumped from only 20 per cent of the employees to 100 per cent," she noted.

Mohamed Ramadan, secretary general of the ESA formed at the EREC, said that one year after it was set up, the ESA has helped in improving worker performance, an achievement that was reflected in the company's production and profits.

The company's turnover rose by 4.6 per cent during 94/95 while its pre-tax profits amounted to LE11,593 million, compared to LE8,852 million the previous year.

In addition, said Ramadan, employee ownership of company shares has prompted an increase in the number of working hours and a drop in absentee rates. Share ownership has given the employees a morale boost.

"I feel more secure and enjoy the feeling of being equal to any other employee, including the chairman of the company," said Emile Ibrahim, an office boy at EREC. "We all are shareholders with the same rights and duties."

## Market report

### New gains for a new year

THE CAPITAL Market celebrated the end of the year with a 1.05 point increase in its index, which closed at 213.95 points for the week ending 28 December. The total volume of trading also increased, reaching LE79.2 million.

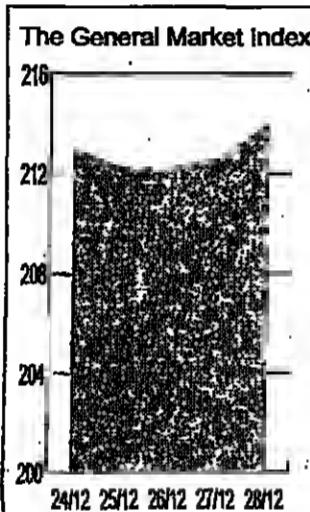
End of year festivities, however, were marred by poor performance in the manufacturing sector. Its index fell by 0.46 points to close at 283.96. Shares of the Paints and Chemical Industries lost LE15 per share to level off at LE680, while those of the Mist for Soft Drinks and Food Preservation (Misroot) lost LE1.4 per share to close at LE26.6.

Twelve other manufacturing sector companies, however, witnessed an increase in share value. Among the leaders was the Nile Pharmaceuticals and Chemical Industries Company which gained LE3.5 per share to close at LE53.5. Shares of the Engineering and Architectural Industries Company gained LE0.01 to close at LE4.26.

For financial sector companies, it was a good week. In addition to its index gaining 3.69 points to close at 225.64, it dominated the market in terms of the value of shares traded — LE36.3 million in shares exchanged hands. Shares of the Misr Exporter Bank recorded the greatest increase, almost tripling in value to finally level off at LE505. Trading in the Gulf-Egyptian Bank's shares continued around 25 per cent of the total number of market transactions. The bank traded 292,900 shares at LE2 per share. The Commercial International Bank's shares lost LE3.25 per share to close at LE508.75. Also declining in value, shares of El-Watany Bank lost LE0.02 per share to close at LE3.5.

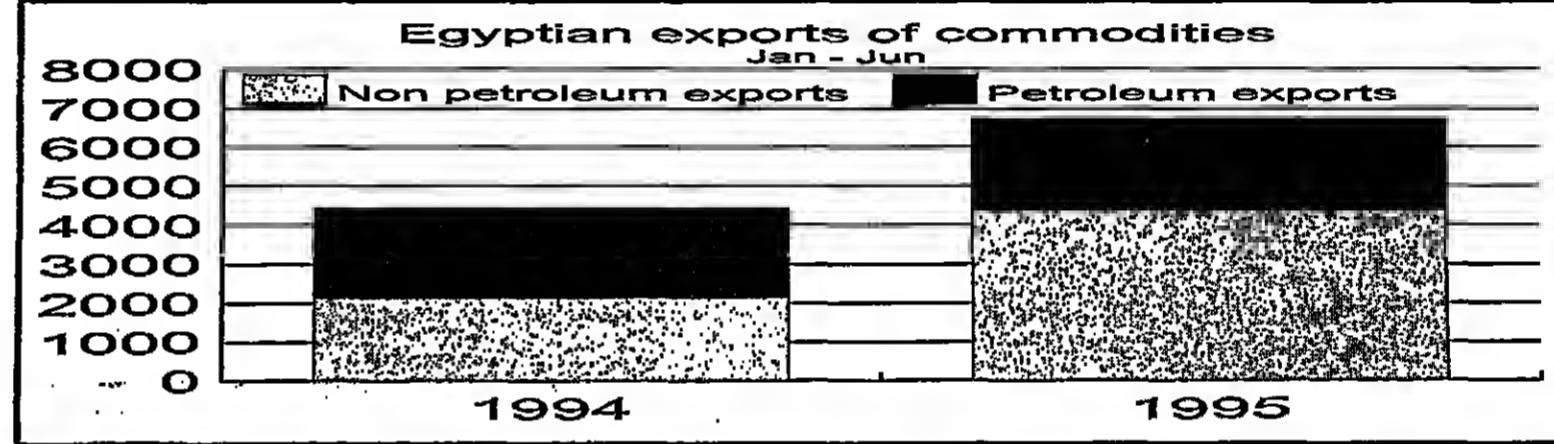
For a change, service sector companies also had a good week. The sector's index gained 3.66 points, closing at 136.67 points. Analysts attributed the increase to gains in the value of the Nile Badrawi Hospital's shares. Its stock gained LE45.03 to close at LE845.56 per share.

By the end of the week, the shares of 29 companies had increased in value, 28 declined and 53 remained unchanged.



## Recipe for an ailing deficit

The persistence of a balance of trade deficit topping \$8.3 billion in fiscal 94/95 calls for speedy action, experts tell Mahmoud El-Qassas



Egypt's economic reform programme may have led to a stable exchange rate, lower inflation and a decline in the budget deficit, but the success of these fiscal and monetary reform policies has been marred by a rapidly increasing balance of trade deficit which, say experts, can only be brought under control by increased productivity and competitiveness.

The trade deficit, which stood at \$7,538 billion in fiscal 1990/91, has shown little sign of decreasing, even after the reform programme was implemented. In fiscal 1994/95, the deficit exceeded \$8.3 billion.

A main reason for this increase, said Hamdi Abdel-Azim, dean of El-Sadat Academy for Administrative Sciences, lies in the fact that industrial production and exports

were not set down as priorities in the first phase of the economic reform programme. The first phase was geared towards monetary and fiscal reforms which aimed at cutting the budget deficit and controlling inflation.

Although the second phase of reforms, launched in 1993, focused on upgrading the industrial sector to enable it to meet the needs of local consumers and produce a surplus for exports, Abdel-Azim maintained that, so far, the government has not been able to realise this goal.

While the current account balance recorded a surplus from 1991 to 1995, this was mainly due to the flow of worker remittances and a surplus in trade of services balance. But, warned Abdel-Azim, these remittances could begin to decline as Arab countries continue to opt for lower-priced Asian labour in place of Egyptian workers. He argued that a decline in remittances, coupled with a continuous increase in the balance of trade deficit could push the balance of payments once more into a deficit, to turn exerting a downward pressure on the Egyptian pound.

Samir Tobar, head of the National Democratic Party's economic committee, pointed out that commodity exports are more stable sources of foreign currency than tourism and consumer taste is a main prerequisite for capturing a large share of international trade," stated Tobar. A step in the right direction, he added, would be for Egypt to hold international fairs that aim to conclude trade deals and not just display products.

But while commodity exports are on the rise, the ever-increasing trade deficit looms ominously on the horizon. "Up

until now, these sources of foreign currency have been rewarding," said Tobar. "However, we cannot guarantee that favourable conditions will prevail in the long run, and therefore, we should take more steps to narrow the trade deficit."

Actions, however, are more difficult than words, and gaining a stronger foothold in international markets will be no easy task, he said. "Understanding foreign markets and consumer taste is a main prerequisite for capturing a large share of international trade," stated Tobar. A step in the right direction, he added, would be for Egypt to hold international fairs that aim to conclude trade deals and not just display products.

In addition, customs and cargo procedures must be revised. "There are too many agencies

that an exporter must deal with," noted Tobar. "Their roles, which are often conflicting, must be re-examined and red tape must be cut in order to encourage exports."

The state, argued Mahmoud El-Arabi, chairman of the Federation of Chambers of Commerce, could play a greater role in export promotion as a means to this end. Other countries, he pointed out, like South Korea, Malaysia and Thailand have done this with noteworthy results.

While, concedes El-Arabi, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) precludes direct subsidies for exports, he said that the government should provide indirect subsidies in order to promote exports. "Forms of indirect subsidies include tax exemptions for export-oriented activities, exempting all production equipment from customs tariffs, providing concessional rates of interest for export loans and reducing cargo rates on exports," he said.

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## Packaging for all

Modern technology merges with sound planning in the export business. Mona El-Fiqi reports



photo: nour Sobhi

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As the first of its kind in the Middle East, the IEC's facilities ensure that goods are exported according to the highest international standards," he noted.

Ahmed Qassem, a fruit and vegetable exporter added, "Its unique location within the airport grounds assists exporters with the forwarding process."

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## 4 Region

## Headline hunting

**What will make the news in 1996?**  
**Al-Ahram Weekly** takes a poll on the regional issues expected to make the headlines in the next year

### The peace process

**Nassif Hitti, assistant secretary-general of the Arab League**  
The peace process in the Middle East was the most important issue of 1995. I hope that there are developments in 1996 especially on the Syrian track, which is enjoying a new and positive atmosphere that might give it a strong push in 1996. In May of this year there will also be the beginning of the final phase of Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. These will tackle vital issues that will put the final touch on the whole process.

**Mahmoud Zahar, Hamas spokesman in the Gaza Strip**

In 1996 Israel will still hold 70 per cent of Palestinian land in the West Bank and 40 per cent in Gaza. There will never be a full Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian lands, and the issue of Jerusalem is unlikely to be solved. The Israelis may only allow the Palestinians religious supervision of sacred mosques and churches in Jerusalem which is not fair to the Palestinians.

**Heba Handousa, economist and managing director of the Economic Research Forum**

The peace process implies both threats and opportunities. It needs a quick response on the part of governments at the macro level: in the manipulation of tariff levels and customs procedures and the reform of institutions.

On the plus side, it is going to improve the competitiveness of countries in the region in attracting foreign investments and transnational companies. So far the region has attracted about \$2bn a year in foreign direct investment (FDI). When we compare this to a country as small as Malaysia which attracted \$4bn of FDI last year, then we can see the scope for increasing FDI to the region. Political instability is the essential reason why multinationals have been hesitant to come.

### Israel

**Mohamed Sobeih, secretary-general of the Palestinian National Council**

The assassination of Yitzhak Rabin underlined how deeply Jewish terrorism is rooted inside and outside Israel. It also shows the importance of fighting extremism and racism in some Jewish circles through halting the financial aid they receive from organisations in the US.

### Iran

**Assef Bayat, Iranian sociologist at the American University in Cairo**

The Democratic Islamic Movement emerged in Iran, calling for a reconciliation of Islam with modernity and the Islamisation of society and not politics. This movement, if it succeeds, will have an impact on internal politics in Iran as well as the whole region.

**Abdel-Moneim Said, Director of Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies**

The US boycotted Iran for its alleged attempt to develop its nuclear reactors to serve military purposes. Any development of these reactors will ignite the nuclear armament race in the region, which is contrary to US policy.

### Arab reconciliation

**Suleiman Awwad, minister-plenipotentiary in the Egyptian mission to the UN**

Arab reconciliation is another issue that should be addressed in 1996. Last year there were two important attempts, one by the United Arab Emirates' Sheikh Zayed, and the other by the Arab League Secretary-General Esmaa Abdel-Meguid to relieve the sufferings of the Iraqis.

**Mahmoud Zahar, Hamas spokesman in the Gaza Strip**

I hope that 1996 will witness reconciliation among Arab regimes, especially with Iraq as the Iraqi people are the only victims. Arab governments should be more concerned about the Iraqi people than the shortcomings of the regime.

### Borders

**Nassif Hitti, assistant secretary-general of the Arab League**

(demarcation) of borders is a problem that will continue into 1996. The problem of borders among Arab countries should be politically addressed, otherwise it will have negative consequences for the region.

### Economic prospects

**Heba Handousa, managing director of the Economic Research Forum**

The most important event of 1995 was the negotiations with the European Union over trade agreements. It is a splendid opportunity for various countries to take advantage of. But it also poses many challenges in terms of our own market in the Middle East which could be taken over by European firms. The cost will be very high if we do not rationalise our industries.

**Farouq Abu-Eissa, head of the Arab Lawyers Union**

Low-income groups will suffer from a drop in their standard of living. The gap between social classes will widen. This will threaten social stability. The gap is a result of the economic policies in the region imposed by the IMF and the World Bank. It is also due to the insistence of the North in exerting control over the South.

### Western Sahara

**Suleiman Awwad, minister-plenipotentiary in the Egyptian mission to the UN**

The problem of the Western Sahara will impose itself as an important issue in 1996. The UN under secretary-general will bold talks with the parties concerned with the issue — the Polisario, Morocco and Algeria — to reach a settlement.

### The US

**Salah El-Mokhtar, editor-in-chief of the Arabic Al-Jumhoriya newspaper**

We can say that 1995 was the year of the awakening with people defending their (national) independence and playing a distinguished role in confronting the idea of a unipolar world. This recognition of the importance of independence has belittled American hegemony in the international order.

It will restore equilibrium in the international arena after years of imbalance. For example, eastern Europe, with the exception of East Germany, has returned to the socialist bloc after the failure of the capitalist concept in these states. In Russia as well there is the victory of the nationalist and communist camp over the liberal, capitalist one.

### Terrorism

**Farouq Abu-Eissa, head of the Arab Lawyers Union**

Despite the clampdown on terrorism, this phenomenon will continue in 1996 as the main hotbed of terrorism remains, namely the National Islamic Front in Sudan. This will continue until the Sudanese people overthrow the government.

### Yemen-Eritrea

**Suleiman Awwad, minister-plenipotentiary in the Egyptian mission to the UN**

The Yemeni-Eritrean struggle is another development that is expected to be tackled in 1996 either through bilateral and regional channels, namely the Arab League, or through the UN as Yemen has announced.

**Reported by Rasha Sead and Sherine Bahaa**

# Standing up for the disinherited

**Samia Khalil is running against Yasser Arafat for the presidency of the Palestinian Interim Authority. Graham Usher interviewed her in Ramallah**



Last month, Samia Khalil announced her intention to run for the presidency of the Palestinian Interim Self-Governing Authority in the upcoming elections due to be held on 20 January.

Umm Khalil is the director of one of the largest charitable organisations in the Occupied Territories, the Society of Insh Al-Urus based in Al-Bireh, the West Bank. Since 1967, she has been a member of the Palestine National Council. She is also the current president of the PLO's General Union of Palestinian Women.

In the interview below, she gives her reasons for being the sole challenger to Yasser Arafat in the presidential elections, as well as citing what for her are the crucial tasks facing Palestinian society in the coming period.

**Why did you decide to run for presidency?**  
First of all, it is my right as a Palestinian woman, as someone who has given 40 years of her life to the Palestinian struggle, to stand for the presidency of the Palestinian Council. Second, I believe the current "peace process" does not provide a just solution to the Palestinian question.

The Israelis are still expropriating our lands, by thousands of dunams, forcing us to live in isolated cantons. The so-called bypass roads are separating one Palestinian area from another. Students in Gaza cannot travel freely to their universities in Birzeit, Hebron, Bethlehem and Jerusalem. The prisoners are still in jail, despite promises from the Israelis that

they are going to be released. For these reasons, I am standing for election.

If elected, what are your policy priorities? And how do they differ from those of Yasir Arafat?

I am unaware of Chairman Arafat's programme. My programme may be summarised very simply. I believe that the Oslo-based peace process will not lead to Palestinian sovereignty. It will not lead to our freedom. For sure, it's good to see the Israeli army leave our cities in Gaza and the West Bank, for us to be able freely to raise our flag. But all this is by order of the Israelis. It is out of our hands. It is Israel that decides which Palestinians can return to their homeland and which cannot.

My son, for example, is not allowed to return. I sought permission for his return from the Israeli authorities. They told me to go to the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). So I applied to the PNA. After 23 days, the PNA told me it could do nothing about my son without permission from Israel. This summarises the Oslo process perfectly. The Palestinians still have no control over their lives. We are treated as nothing.

Let me be clear. I am not against peace with Israel. I supported the Palestinian National Council's 1988 decision in Algiers to legally recognise Israel behind its 1967 borders in exchange for peace, security and an independent Palestinian state. The majority of Palestinians support this solution. But, since then, Israel has refused this solution. With the Oslo and

Taba agreements, they are still refusing. So are you in favour of amending the Oslo accords, of stopping the peace negotiations with Israel?

No, I am a peaceful woman. I don't want to solve the problem by force. I want to solve it by peaceful means. Nor am I against negotiations with Israel. But I want the peace to be a real peace. I want the negotiations to address the basic issues: the question of Jerusalem, settlements, refugees and the borders of a future Palestinian state.

I want also to correct the flaws in the original Oslo agreement, that Palestinians can now enjoy genuine sovereignty over their own education, their own economic system, over agriculture, over their own lives. We seek full independence. Without this, believe me, war will return to this land.

**Who do you see as your main constituencies, your main bases of support?**

I will get support from all those Palestinians whose situation has worsened with the peace process. The families of the prisoners, the families of the martyrs. I seek to represent the dis-inherited of our society.

Since 1967, I have been the head of 55 charitable societies in the West Bank and Gaza. These societies serve around 32,000 Palestinians. They have provided 5,000 jobs for women. We have 240 kindergartens and nursery places for children so that women can work outside their homes. In each case, we are encouraging Palestinian independence. We don't

want our people to be beggars. These, I feel, are my constituencies.

**Do you view yourself as a candidate who advocates the interests of Palestinian women?**  
Not exclusively women's interests, no. I seek to advocate the interests of all Palestinians: men, women and children. But, of course, I want Palestinian women to achieve equality with their men.

**How do you see those Palestinian parties which have decided to boycott the elections?**

For me, the crucial task in the current period is to achieve national unity. If the Palestinians are not together, we will not go one step forward. I believe that all Palestinians should participate in these elections.

I have also had discussions with representatives from the opposition parties. Many of their members have said they will vote for me in the elections out of a sense of national duty. A recent study showed that the electoral campaigns of Yasser Arafat and his Fatah movement had received much more Palestinian media coverage than other candidates and parties. Do you sense any discrimination against you?

No. When Arafat came to Ramallah, he invited me to sit beside him during the PNA cabinet meeting. We are old friends. I cannot say that the PNA has prevented me from saying or doing anything in my campaign.

## Changing the odds

The bargaining chips have changed and the players are adjusting their game. Mohamed El-Sayed Said weighs up prospects on the Syrian-Israeli track

Encouraged by President Clinton's need for a diplomatic victory in the course of his re-election campaign, and emboldened by the passing of Rabin, the Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad made the first move towards the resumption of peace talks with Israel. The cost of this move was only the adoption of milder language and a few newspaper articles showing a willingness to speak better of Israel.

In return, the new Israeli prime minister went so far as to indicate that Israel may not insist on the stationing of early warning systems on the Golan Heights. In a matter of a few days, Syrian-Israeli talks were resumed in Maryland, close to Washington DC. What changed to allow the resurrection of the long stalled negotiations? Not really much in the substance of the negotiations. The real change took place in the arena of symbolic politics between Israel and Syria.

Since the start of the process, bullying was the true name of the game between the two parties. Both were more involved in posturing than in real negotiations over the substance of issues on the agenda. For outside observers this denoted a tough interaction between two pig-headed and immutable negotiation styles. In fact this appearance is, to the two parties at least, quite rational.

Between Syria and Israel there exist true real hurdles on the road to peace-making. Syria is not so scared of normalisation with Israel. The latter does not seem to be frightened by the configuration of negotiating chips and the real odds. It was this change that may have convinced a man such as Hafez Al-Assad, who built his fame on stubbornness, to change his negotiating style.

But these two factors are only creating new contours for the game of negotiations between Syria and Israel. They are not the cause behind the change of tactics. The most important reason seems to be a change in the configuration of negotiating chips and the real odds. It was this change that may have convinced a man such as

needs peace. But the nature of peace is not to be understood by Israel as a green light to discount Syria's role in the area.

For Israel, the purpose behind the symbolism of toughness is exactly the opposite. It is meant to deprive Syria of its veto power, and to force it to swallow the role of a smaller partner in the politics of the region if, and only if, it accommodates the role of Israel as the dominant power in the Fertile Crescent. In this light, breaking the other's will is the true essence of the game between the two.

But if this is to be seen as the reason behind the stalling of negotiations, what has changed to allow their resumption? Have either, or both, parties dropped their interest in this game? And what are the prospects for the peace talks in the light of the new factors that led to their revival?

The passing of the former prime minister of Israel may be counted as a factor. A man who was never known to be gifted in the art of politics had no reason for bungling. Another factor is the approaching American presidential election campaign and the need for the diplomatic breakthrough which promotes the image of Bill Clinton as a clever statesman interested in and capable of running a competent foreign policy.

But these two factors are only creating new contours for the game of negotiations between Syria and Israel. They are not the cause behind the change of tactics. The most important reason seems to be a change in the configuration of negotiating chips and the real odds. It was this change that may have convinced a man such as

Hafez Al-Assad, who built his fame on stubbornness, to change his negotiating style.

For Syria, the configuration of negotiating chips has changed for two reasons. First is the fact that normalisation between Arabs and Israel is proceeding without the consent of Syria, or more accurately, in spite of its objections.

Secondly, Syria seems to be now besieged by hostile regimes from all sides with the single exception of Lebanon.

Hope for a breakthrough on the Iraq issue is evaporating. Iran's support is dwindling. The self-rule formula has not blown up and a belligerent Arafat is entrenched in his power.

Jordan is more firmly anchored on its stakes on Israel and the United States. A sympathetic Egypt is willing to accommodate Syrian tactics only half-

way. Even Lebanon cannot wait for ever.

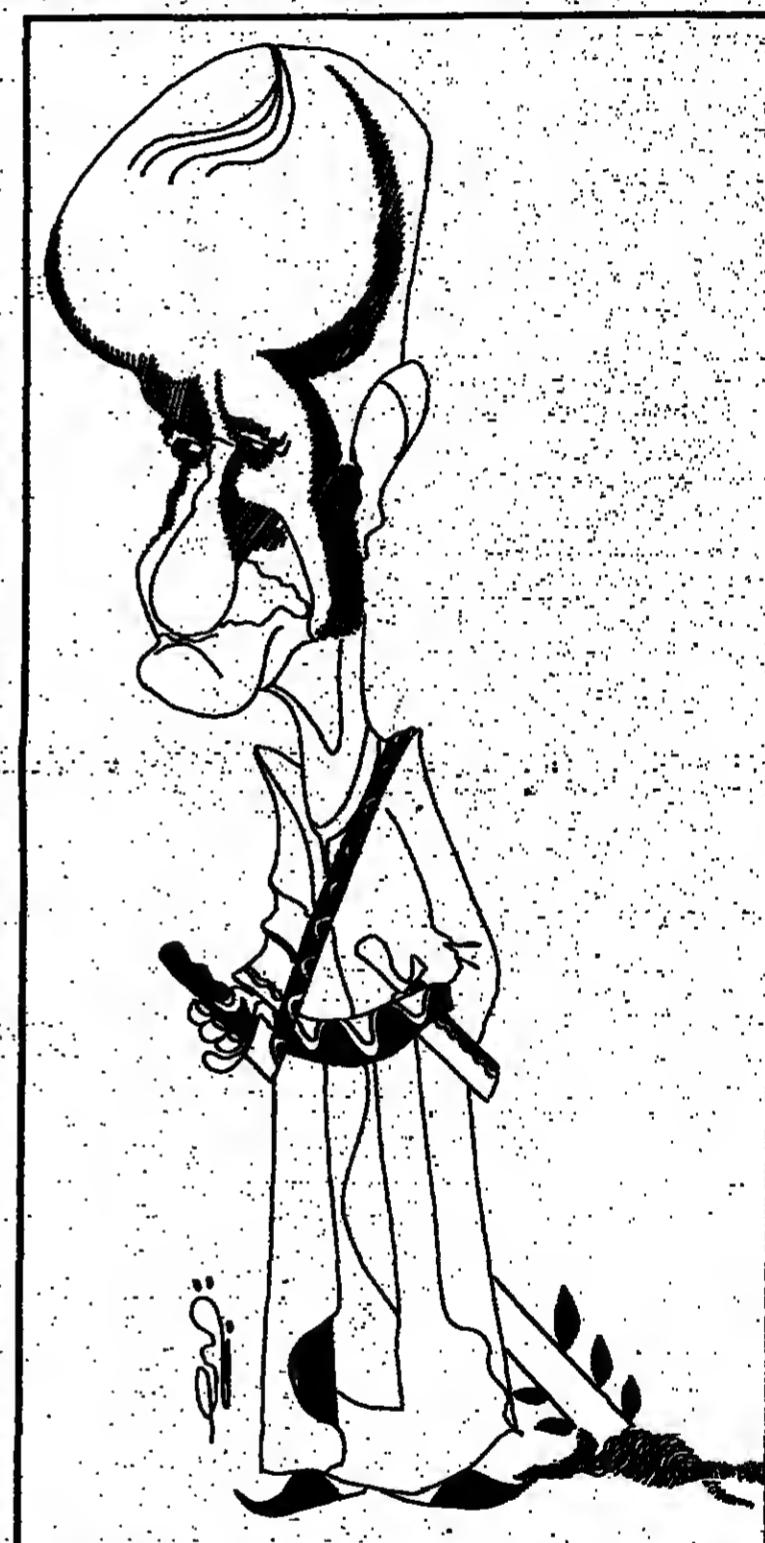
All this demanded a change of perspective on the part of Syria. The change is far from complete since Syria could still rely on other factors of power. The signals of compromise sent out by Syria were perfectly synchronised with two major events. The most significant is the release of thousands of Muslim Brothers and other radical opposition elements in Syrian jails. The motives behind this move are certainly far from projecting a new image of a merciful leader. It was simply designed to signal to Israel and to the United States that if Assad is so severely pressured and his interests undermined there exists in Syria a much more radical force that cannot wait for launching Jihad. It is only his regime that could possibly cage this ultra-radical force.

On the other hand, Syria was keen to call a meeting of the Damascus Declaration member states, thus symbolising that it is still far from being cornered and isolated.

For Israel, the bargaining chips have changed as well. It is not just the death of Rabin that caused this change. It is rather the weaker position of Peres vis-a-vis his rivals from the Likud party who will soon be challenging him in the elections for the job of prime minister. Peres could pursue one of two tactics in so far as the Arab-Israeli peace is concerned.

Traditionally, it was safe for the Labour, under Rabin, to show an extremely tough negotiating style towards Syria. Labour could show itself to be winning both peace and unifying security. In addition, it could take pride in breaking the will of the tough Syrian president. If peace was not achieved on the Syrian track, it would have been enough that peace was accomplished with the Jordanians and Palestinians without prejudicing security on the Syrian front. But if Peres pursued this line he would have a very slim chance of enhancing his popularity.

For his staunch enemies among the Israeli public, toughness with Syria will hardly improve his image. Failure to bring peace with Syria will lose him the enthusiasm of both peace sympathisers and neutrals. It would be much more impressive to public opinion to show that he, the true architect of the peace process, has actually brought peace on all fronts, including the painful Lebanese and the rel-



atively powerful and hostile Syrian front. The logic is clear and even seductive.

If peace has certain pitfalls for some, it is also true that it will pay the cost anyway. It is thus much smarter to aim for the entire reward for the whole peace process, and to bid for the job of the prime minister as the man who brought peace to Israel. Keeping the

fruits of an all-encompassing peace could be seen as an adequate compensation for the failure to build Syria's will.

In light of this, we can expect a breakthrough on the Syrian-Israeli track in the near future. But if this breakthrough fails to come about in the next few months, it may never come at all.

## Lonely at the top

The Islamist Welfare Party topped the polls, but it cannot win any friends in parliament, writes Arshad Uz-Zaman

model of Israel, where the coalition partners decided to share power on the basis of each serving a two-year term.

If the RP's score is impressive, no less remarkable is the result of the pro-Kurdish HADEP in south-eastern Turkey. More than 250,000 security forces have been fighting a murderous war in the inhospitable mountains of the south-east against the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK). This 11-year war has claimed nearly 11,000 lives and the entire region wears a des

# Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

On Thursday 18 February 1898, the honourable Hassan Bey Madkur stood before the General Assembly, one of the two *Souverain* (consultative) councils in Egypt at the time, and offered to write a letter to the government on behalf of his "venerable colleagues". The letter would "beseech the government to act, from hereon, on behalf of justice and the public welfare by selling its movable and non-movable assets only via public auction, announced beforehand in the official gazette."

In the ensuing discussion on the floor of the council, a handful of collaborators with the authorities objected to Madkur's proposal on the grounds that it would "injure the government". In response, *Al-Ahram* commented, "How can the government permit itself to injure an entire nation, gentle and easily prone to emotion, and not permit that nation to cry out in sorrow to those who acted unrightly and tell them that they committed villainy."

Madkur's manner would certainly have been considered impudent and contentious in those times. Yet, according to *Al-Ahram*, his motives were compelling. Firstly, one of the functions of the legislative council was "to restrain the government morally and tangibly from acting in a manner that does not concur with the welfare of the nation." Thus, "the assembly has indicated its condemnation on behalf of its constituents and finds that the government should review this instance carefully, if it considers embarking on this course again in the future." Secondly, passion was provoked by the nature of the occurrence that prompted the assembly's debate. It involved a plot of governmental land known as the Basandila lot, which, as *Al-Ahram* goes on to say, "was granted to a company dear to the government as some of its owners are themselves among our nation's guardians. The reason for this, it is alleged, is that, during the minister's session in which the sale of this lot was discussed, the devil caused a representative to forget to mention that an Egyptian-owned company had made a higher offer. As a result, the fraudulent sale was concluded at the expense of this ever fruitful land which is Egypt."

This story, which had begun four years earlier, in 1894, provides a vivid example of how Egypt was systematically being sold off on a grand scale. It is a story that merits our attention as it is told through the pages of *Al-Ahram*.

The term "the plunder of Egypt" has been frequently used by European authors to describe British policies from Britain's occupation of Egypt in 1882 to the outbreak of World War I in 1914. In general, these authors refer to the acquisition by foreign companies of agricultural land and their control of the financial machinery of the country. However, they neglected to mention two points. Firstly, the process of "plundering" was never as easy as they portray. In their focus on economic factors, they tended to ignore the human factor, in which there was much give and

take. Secondly, the process went far beyond agriculture and finance. In fact, the Europeans exercised authority over the country's finances long before the British occupation. An equally, if not more, enticing quarry for the Europeans were the new public services and utilities that came into being with the modernising state: the railroad, electricity, and shipping companies to name a few.

Prior to the British occupation, the Khedive Ismail personally owned, in the name of the crown, 434,975 feddans of land. He put up as collateral against a loan of nine million pounds and the land was put under special administration under the law of liquidation of 1880, which regulated loan repayments through the income generated from the land. At the same time, the royal family owned more than 400,000 feddans of land, which was also put up as collateral by the Khedive for a loan from the House of Rothschild of 8.5 million pounds. This land was put under the special board to supervise the payments on the loan. The Egyptian government also authorised the sale of portions of this land, the proceeds of which could also be used to settle portions of the loan.

This system continued until 1898, when the need for money to finance the recovery of Sudan mitigated the selling of both government and royal family lands. From 1882 to 1898, the occupation authorities would periodically test the Egyptian reaction toward selling the land to British concerns. The most important such test took place between 1892-1894 over the sale of Basandila. The ensuing battle that raged over the issue was closely covered by *Al-Ahram*.

The British High Commissioner's yearly report on Egypt sounded the opening shots. He severely criticised the supervisory council over the royal lands for failing to lease the land to farmers or failing to hire buyers in order to generate the monies to fulfil the commitments to the House of Rothschild. The official on the council described the charges as exaggerated on both counts. And while Egyptians could benefit from some reduction in the prices, they were not, in the minds of the authorities, the intended beneficiaries. Blatantly betraying their true intentions, the council issued a resolution decreeing "the reduction by 40 per cent in the current price value of the land." The measure prompted *Al-Ahram* to comment, "The Rothschilds should have no problem accepting the reduction. They will lose nothing." Nor did they complain. The measure provided them their yearly payment of 300,000 pounds.

Nevertheless, paying off the loan was not the source of contention. It was to whom the price-reduced lands would be sold. Nor was the issue have aroused such future were it not for an anticipated development that a group of Egyptian landowners would join together to form a company and enter the tender.

We learn from *Al-Ahram*, therefore, that

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The term 'the plunder of Egypt' has been frequently used by European authors to describe British policies from Britain's occupation of Egypt in 1882 to the outbreak of World War I in 1914. In this instalment of his chronicle of modern Egyptian history as seen through the pages of *Al-Ahram*. Dr Yunan Labib Rizq looks at the sale of Egyptian land and companies to foreign buyers with the connivance of the occupying power

there were two major rival companies. One was the Beheira Irrigation Company owned by foreign financiers. The other was a company "formed by prominent Egyptians" for whom Abdulla Bey El-Babli was the spokesman. Evidently, the Egyptian company had no official name at first, for the newspaper referred to it as "the Babli Company". Yet, we do know that Hassan Madkur, the General Assembly member quoted at the beginning of this article was also a part-owner of the company.

We further learn that the British financial advisor subjected Babli to considerable pressure to which he eventually succumbed. On 10 May 1894, we read, "Reports have reached the newspaper from Cairo to the effect that the mediation used by the financial advisor, Palmer, to convince Babli to withdraw his tender for Basandila and to submit for Bilqas instead have succeeded. Babli has in fact pledged this in writing."

It is also interesting to discover that the Khedive Abbas II supported the Egyptian-owned company, through the agency of the prime minister at the time, Nubar Pasha. "Patriots voice their praise for the honourable Nubar Pasha who supported them in the contest over the Basandila lot, a fact that has been cited in all the newspapers as testimony of his keenness to promote the interests of our country over other interests," *Al-Ahram* commented.

Nevertheless, Babli's acceptance of the offer of compensation with the Bilqas lot was a source of great disappointment. An *Al-Ahram* editorial subjected him to severe



Lord Cremer

sale, the shipping company soon became a symbol of the nation's sovereignty up for tender. One of the Khedive Ismail's most noted achievements, the national shipping line carried the Egyptian flag around the world. The idea of selling the company was first mooted in 1883, a year after the British occupation. It was a handy way for Egypt to pay back its debts, according to Lord Devon. It was 15 years later that the idea became a reality, the most important impediment being national opposition.

In January 1898, as the sale of the company appeared almost certain, *Al-Ahram* expresses the widely felt sense of outrage. On 24 January it reported, "We have learned from reliable sources that the Ministry of Finance has set the price of 150,000 pounds for the sale of the royal steamers, on the condition that the purchaser construct a new basin for the cleaning and maintenance of the ships the cost of which will be 80,000 pounds." The newspaper's comment was succinct: "This sale would be perfidy!" This was only the opening remark in a campaign that grew increasingly vociferous the more the British financial advisor advanced in the project.

On the following day, *Al-Ahram* gave full coverage to the issue, publishing the opinions of all the newspapers that appeared in Egypt at the time, regardless of their language. All were unanimous in their censure of the measure and their condemnation of the government which intends to deprive the nation of its shipping line and dockyards for the benefit of a British company and to the advantage of the British government.

Unfortunately, the matter was beyond the good offices of the cabinet of Mustafa Fahmi. In fact, it was out of the government's hands entirely, since it was the British authorities who ultimately took the final decision. On 27 January, *Al-Ahram* announced the sale of the khedivial steamers to a Mr Alderson for 150,000 pounds. "One could hardly imagine a more paltry sum," commented *Al-Ahram* in dismay.

At the same time, various reports indicate that the Beheira company that won the tender for Basandila, took that as a signal to grab more Egyptian land. On 17 June we read, "The Basandila company intends to buy the Ras Al-Khalij from Boghos Pasha Nubar and the Bilqas lot and other lots from the royal land council." A month later a second news item reports that the same company obtained the agreement of the Administration of Government Funds "to buy 100,000 feddans of land in Al-Borralos for 12 piastres a feddan." A few weeks later we read of the company's plans to buy land in the adjacent areas of Balata and Kom Al-Ahmar, elevating its accumulated holdings to 400,000 feddans.

Land was not the only item on sale in the European buying spree in Egypt. Although the spree lasted through the nineties, 1898 marked a zenith. *Al-Ahram* described it as "a year of hardship, misery and misfortune in which the armies of cavalry mustered their forces on the ground and disaster loomed in the air."

The year began with the sale of the Royal Khedivial Shipping Company. If land had been a symbol of national wealth on

criticism: "If he had not conceded, the Egyptian company would certainly have won its just claim," it said. Furthermore, all attempts to evade responsibility were futile. "He is guilty as charged," the newspaper proclaimed. Babli had deceived the entire Egyptian people, not just the members of the company that had appointed him their representative.

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crown lands, the proceeds from which were allocated to paying off the country's debts. On 3 May that year the newspaper announced that the Council of Ministers had met to formulate a plan for the sale of the "property, estate, factories and other such edifices" on the land to a jointly owned French, British and Egyptian company. "Monsieur Souris has travelled to Europe to meet with the financiers over the purchase of 304,000 feddans of choice agricultural land, all in Upper Egypt, as well as nine factories and 160 ferries," the newspaper continued.

Soon minds turned to the public utilities. Heading the list were the railways which had been a government-owned project since their inception. Yet, on 25 February 1898 we turn to the headline: "The government sells the Egyptian railways to an English company!" In spite of rumours concerning the intent to sell, the author of the article expressed his doubts regarding their veracity. "The government has desisted from concluding such damaging contracts for fear of confirming the rumours that it is selling off the country to foreign financiers piece by piece."

That, of course, was not the real reason the contract fell through. The British, even before their occupation of the country, retained control over the vital utilities through the placement of British or pro-British officials in senior positions in their respective administrations. Also, the railways were not profitable. In fact, for the national treasury they were a burden which no foreign company wished to assume. Yet while news of the sale of the northern Egyptian lines faded from the pages of the press, reports surfaced about the possibility of the sale of the Qena-Aswan line and the Sudan line. The venture was certainly associated with the name of Cecil Rhodes, who conceived the Cape to Cairo railway line. *Al-Ahram* confirmed suspicions of this connection when it reported, "It has been proven that the pressures the occupiers are putting on the Egyptian government to sell the Sudanese railways is only intended to serve their well-known goal of reaching Uganda, a project begun by Mr Cecil Rhodes, a close friend of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain who visited Egypt two years ago for that very purpose." Given the circumstances of that tragic year for Egypt, *Al-Ahram* could hardly express surprise at the proposed sale. "One has come to expect the most outlandish deals now that Egypt has become such an enticing prey," it remarked. Its prediction, as often has been the case, proved accurate, for the country would indeed suffer the consequences of more outlandish deals now that the process of selling off Egypt was in full swing.

The author is a renowned historian and a professor of modern history at Ain Shams University.

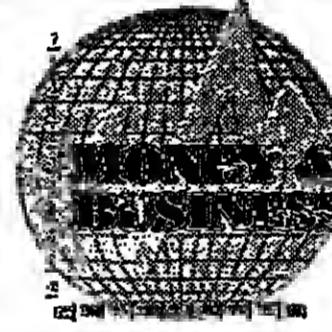


## Conference on natural disasters

THE FIRST international conference in Egypt dealing with preventing the effects of natural disasters will be held from 6-10 January 1996. This conference will be organised by Cairo University, in cooperation with the International Committee for Earthquake Prediction, and sponsored by the National Insurance Co.

National Insurance will organise an all-day workshop on insurance. The conference deal with a number of topics, including engineering, construction, insurance, the role of the media, and insurance, engineering, earthquakes, construction, media and ways to manage the events of a disaster with minimal losses to buildings and persons.

# MONEY & BUSINESS



## Luxembourg records highest income average

WORLD Bank statistics showed Luxembourg to be at the forefront as the annual average income reached US\$39,850. Switzerland came as the second highest country in which the average income reached US\$37,180, followed by Japan, achieving US\$34,030. The United States came sixth, with US\$25,860.

At the bottom of the list lies Mozambique, with US\$80, after Ethiopia US\$130, and Malawi, with US\$140.

The World Bank report also indicated that Thailand made the fastest economic growth over the last 10 years, with average income increasing by 8.2 per cent from 1985-1994, surpassing South Korea's 7.8 growth rate.

## Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt

S.A.E

Out of its full understanding of how important health care is, Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt finances the erection of production lines, facilities for the make up of new factories as well as all required equipment and materials for the companies operating in the medical field. Faisal Bank also provides them with the required capital. The volume of financing reached L.E. 1.6 billion. Faisal Bank holds shares worth L.E. 22 million in numerous companies.

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2- Cairo Specialized Hospital Co.	Roxi - Cairo
3- Mansoura Medical Centre	Mansoura City

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STARTING from the 1960s, many nations of the world have come to realise the important role exports play in the growth of societies and peoples. Nowhere has this been felt more than in South East Asia.

Korea, whose exports did not go beyond US\$30mn in the 60s has now increased to US\$70bn. Similar growth surges have been felt in Singapore and Thailand. At the same time, Egyptian exports

have not gone beyond US\$500mn. Mamduh Thabit Makki, reached chairman of the Federation of Industries and member of the People's Assembly, said that exporting is the prime mover of economic activity. Every increase in the average growth of exports translates into a double increase of the national product. It is a known fact that there is a chronic deficit in the Egyptian

trade balance which began in the 60s whose figures reached US\$7.6bn at the end of 1995. This deficit can be attributed to a doubling in the growth of commodity exports while at the same time, imports have made a marked increase due to development programmes and population growth.

The surplus in the balance of services was the basis for overcoming the budget deficit. With the beginning of

economic reform programme which began in 1991, whose axis pivots mainly on foreign trade, measures were taken to redress the balance of payment and boost exports.

The Ministry of Economy, in cooperation with an American organisation, has prepared a comprehensive study on exports in Egypt and trade relations within the context of new global variables.

The study clarified Egypt's position regionally and internationally, with its major role within the changing political climate of the new Middle East, which requires Egypt to have a strong economy which will give it the capacity to function as a major competitor. This will never happen unless Egypt increases its export activity, for it is only by exporting that Egypt can realise strong economic growth.

## Win some, lose some...

MERCEDES-Benz released its annual sales figures, reporting that sales went up nearly two per cent over the previous year.

Sales of automobiles for 1995 reached 72 billion marks, compared to 70.7 billion marks in 1994. In 1994, 592,000 passenger cars were sold, while strangely enough, this figure dropped to 580,000 in 1995. It was, however, the increase in the truck sales figure, which increased 10 per cent, that made up for the difference. The company is banking on the sales of 600,000 automobiles for 1996, with an increase of 330,000 automobiles.

On the other hand, the company's earnings were affected by the high exchange rate of the German mark, and thus decreased by 1 billion marks.

The volume of sales of passenger cars brought in nearly 40 billion marks while trucks, busses and other commercial vehicles brought in 32 billion marks.

As a result, the company has not realised an overall profit.

## Turkey's political instability triggers battered markets

ALWAYS concerned about the possibility of an Islamic party assuming power a few days ago, many business leaders lobbied against the Islamic Welfare Party, imparting the message that the party should not form the new government. Such political unrest triggered a falling-in-value lira that dropped to 62,500 against the US dollar, with the inflation rate reaching 90 per cent. This disturbed transactions and made industrialists in particular wonder if there is real hope for the party.

Willing to voice their re-

jection of the Islamic Welfare Party, the Turkish Industrialists Association took out advertisements in newspapers demanding cooperation between the True Path Party, Tensu Ciller's party and the Motherland Party.

Turkey recently managed to join the EU Customs Union,

in the hopes that it will provide access for its leather industry. In this regard, businessmen, most anxiously await any indications of improvement, as they are in need of an economic reform programme. The Islamic Welfare Party has yet to display a programme in this regard.

## Egyptian industry exhibition

EVER-keen to back up national industries, Faisal Islamic Bank is sponsoring the Egyptian Industry Exhibition organised by Nila Jat Travel. The conference will be held from 30 January to 18 February 1996 at the Cairo International Conference Centre in Nasr City. The exhibition will display the products of various sectors of industry, including housing and tourism, board chairman Abdal-Hamid Abu Moussa stated.

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**The UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali's visit to Egypt, the Horn of Africa and the Middle East brought into sharp focus the limited scope of the UN mandate. Boutros Ghali has been an outspoken advocate of UN reform: "But that would cost money and nobody is ready to pay." Will Asia's new powers now foot the bill? Gamal Nkrumah looks through Asian eyes at how emerging Asian powers are pressing for a new vision for the United Nations. In exclusive interviews with past and present UN representatives of Japan, India and Pakistan Al-Ahram Weekly catches glimpses of the new UN Asia says it deserves**



## Arbiters of UN reform

Fifty years ago, when the United Nations was founded, the world was a more equitable place. It might come as a surprise to some, but according to recently released World Bank statistical reports, the world's richest fifth have incomes 60 times greater than the poorest fifth, twice the disparity of 30 years ago. The poorest 50 countries are home to one-fifth of the world's people and account for less than 2 per cent of global income. None of the poorest countries have permanent seats at the UN Security Council. Few have a say in deliberations. Their voting patterns at the UN are closely monitored by Western powers, and they are urged by carrot and stick tactics to toe the line.

Resistance to UN reform is actually minimal. Everyone — rich and poor — wants change. The problem is disagreement over the nature of reform. Is the stranglehold of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council over global governance and international relations that hard to break? One of the five permanent members itself is the biggest Asian power — China. But, the bid by the other Asian powers to see UN reforms commensurate with their international political standing and with their economic prowess is gaining momentum.

The West has spearheaded the fight for sweeping UN reforms ranging from the streamlining of the international organisation's bureaucracy and the elimination of some of its specialised agencies to resolving its financial crisis. But, the West appears to be less keen on

the democratisation of the world body. From their side, the Asians appear to be asking the world to recognise and respect their contemporary capabilities. The developing nations of the South in Africa, Asia and the Americas are at odds with the industrially advanced nations of the North over how best the UN can help construct suitable democratic administrative institutional and political structures in the Third World. North and South are at loggerheads over plans to reform the UN. At the heart of the quarrel between North and South is the international debate regarding the relationship between democracy, development and human rights.

Two aspects of the debate have made a deep impression. One, is that the South remains under-represented and feels politically sidelined. The second, is that the South — both the newly industrialised Asian nations and the least developed African ones — remains unconvinced that the globalisation of the world economy, domestic economic liberalisation and deregulation will necessarily lead to development and democracy.

Third World nations have similar, if not identical, views on how the UN is to be strengthened and restructured. The international climate is propitious for a new phase of global governance. We live in a changing world. There are, however, similarities and points of difference as far as the nations of the South are concerned. Africa, with just over 10 per cent of the world's population, accounts for a mere

0.4 per cent of world manufacturing exports and less than one per cent of international trade. Asia, fares far better, and now accounts for 40 per cent of world trade. Such facts and figures are bound to make an imprint on anticipated UN reforms.

Economic growth in Asia is impressive by international standards. In 1994, China — the only Asian permanent member of the UN Security Council — registered an annual economic growth rate of 10 per cent. Malaysia, Korea, Vietnam and Thailand have growth rates of 9 per cent, while Singapore with 8 per cent, Indonesia and Taiwan with 7 per cent, and India with 6 per cent annual economic growth rates are far ahead of the European members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) average of 2.4 per cent per annum.

In sharp contrast, the situation in Africa is far from reassuring. Despite over 150 World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan accords supported by some \$200 billion in net development assistance in the past decade, Africa's economic crisis continues to worsen. Now, UN reforms must take such disparities of fortunes into account. The emerging realities in the Third World will override any talk of a radical democratisation of UN structures.

But, Africa is not alone. South Asia has failed to catch up economically with East Asia. "Can the right to development be denied at the international level on the grounds that there is no consensus on

what obligations it imposes on the developed countries? The answer is a clear no," said Ahmad Kamal, Pakistan's permanent representative to the UN and president of the UN's Economic and Social Council.

"Even in the area of civil and political rights, there is often no consensus on the exact content of the rights. Yet we do not jettison these rights because we cannot arrive at a complete agreement on what they entail. In fact, in the case of the Right to Development, there is considerable agreement on what the developed countries should do to promote economic growth and development," Ambassador Kamal said.

Another prominent Pakistani closely associated with the UN, Maheb Ul-Haq, just completed his term as Special Advisor to the Administrator of the UN Development Programme. He was the creator and prime author of UNDP's annual Human Development Reports. "Economic and financial power is much more diffused now than in 1945, when the United States produced over one-half of the global output compared to less than one-fifth today," Ul-Haq said.

"The UN has spent more on peacekeeping operations in the last two years than in the preceding 48," Ul-Haq pointed out. The developing countries of the South account for 15 per cent world military spending — \$118 billion annually. "What these new situations require is socio-economic development upstream, not UN sol-

diers in blue berets downstream," Ul-Haq noted. "If there are global needs, there must be some global means of funding. The world community cannot rely on the fitful generosity of individual nations for its collective security," Ul-Haq stressed. He suggested that the composition of the new Economic Security Council, commensurate with the new economic world order, should "reflect the changing balance of political and economic power. It should include those countries which are most populous and have the largest real economies as members."

UN reform with an Asian tinge is imminent. Most of Asia's emerging powers feel somewhat sidelined in the UN Security Council. African, Middle Eastern and Latin American countries also feel sidelined, but it is the Asian powers — because of their emerging economic prowess, their political weight and the sheer size of their population — that seem destined to set the agenda for UN reform. In the 21st century, Asia will undoubtedly flaunt its increased political sophistication. The political consequences would be profound.

The outcome of UN reform is emerging even though a radical shake-up of the international organisation is not on the cards. To take the UN and reshape it into a keenly focused and highly rewarding venture is no easy matter. With the Security Council as catalyst, the Asian powers seem to be planning to garner support for their cause by aligning themselves with the rest of the South — and that's no fatuous exhortation.

## The chrysanthemum claim

Is it time for Japan to exercise clout in the United Nations? Is Japan ready to take up a permanent seat on the UN Security Council? Is Japan beginning to consider how its economic strength can service the UN? If so, the world would be very unwise to ignore the feelings now being put out by Tokyo.

"Japan is, after the United States of America, the second-ranking economic power in the world in terms of Gross Domestic Product [\\$5.1 trillion in 1995]. And it is the largest donor nation," Ambassador Yosuke Hatano told *Al-Ahram Weekly* in Cairo two months ago. Hatano was Japan's ambassador to the UN in New York between 1990 and 1994, during which time Japan was a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for a two-year term. However, Hatano felt that his powers were very limited even when he served as the council's president in 1993.

"With respect to an increase in the permanent membership of the Security Council, Japan is of the view that the election of the countries to be added should be made on the capacity and willingness of the countries concerned to assume global responsibilities," Hatano said. America is \\$1.4 billion in arrears to the UN and yet it is a Security Council permanent member. Japan has no such incriminating debts and yet it has no say in the running of the UN.

Let us get some necessary disclaimers on the record first. No, Japan is not immune to economic recession. It is experiencing the most agonising economic slump with an unprecedented three per cent unemployment rate — insignificant by European standards, but unacceptable in Japan. Japan's economic growth rate has plummeted to 0.3 per cent in the first six months of this year. No, the Japanese are not particularly liked by their neighbours for creating a yen-controlled economic zone reminiscent of the pre-World War II Imperial Japanese East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. No, it is not enough for the Japanese taxpayer to bail out the UN; the Japanese must calculate the cost of playing a more responsible role in the UN. And no, Japan is not fanning these issues into flame for purely political reasons.

Japanese diplomats never miss the chance today to explore their Western allies' intentions. "The rise of China, the unification of Korea, the possible shift of the centre of gravity of Russian policy toward Siberia — all have different significance for Japan than they have for the US," former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger told the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee early last year.

Japan is also increasing military spending at a faster rate than most Western nations; the Japanese defence agency is pushing for a four per cent rise in defence spending for the fiscal year 1995-96. But in his statement at the 49th session of the UN General Assembly, Japan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Yohei Kono declared that Japan would not resort to the use of force which is prohibited by its constitution.

No Asian power is likely to challenge the basic precept that in the post-Cold War era, Japan's security continues to rest in the hands of the US nuclear deterrent. According to Ambassador Hatano, "Japan is too big to be regarded solely as an 'Asian' power — Japan is a global power."

Many in Japan and the rest of the world want to see Japan as a permanent member of the UN Security Council before the turn of the century. Today the question must be posed as to whether and how Japan can be included in the decision-making process of the council even though it has no permanent member status.

In contrast to the ambiguous status of defeated Japan knocking at the doors of the UN in 1956 and contributing a mere pittance, Japan today is the second largest contributor to UN peace-keeping operations, providing 12.5 per cent of the total costs of such operations, ahead of permanent members of the Security Council such as Russia, France, Britain and China.

"Japan contributed \$4 billion to the Gulf War which amounts to three years of the UN budget. The European Union and the US complained bitterly about the 'modest' Japanese contribution and urged Japan to pay much more for the war effort because Japan, they warned, would suffer most from a third Gulf crisis. Japan was then obliged to pay an additional \$9 billion. In total Japan paid no less than \$13 billion to the Gulf War effort," Hatano explained.

"The US did not thank Japan, and instead complained that Japan made the contributions reluctantly. For me this was a very disappointing episode," he said. "I had to wait in the corridor to find out what was actually going on in the Security Council. I got information second hand from the Japanese and international media and was barred from participating in the deliberations between the five permanent Security Council members even though Japan was the largest financial contributor to the Gulf War effort. Contributor or not, Japan was not a permanent Security Council member and, therefore, had no right to participate in the discussions," Hatano complained bitterly.

Next, Hatano drew an analogy between the Japanese contribution to the UN and the American Revolution. "The Boston Tea Party of 1773 came to a head when the tea duty was lifted in Britain but retained in the British colonies in America. And Americans, in protest, dumped a cargo of tea in the harbour of Boston, Massachusetts," mused Hatano. "The moral of the story is that there is no taxation without representation." He revealed that even though Japan had not yet officially requested permanent membership in the Security Council, the issue was subject to nationwide discussion in Japan and he personally felt that Japan should become a permanent member.

"What do we gain from being a permanent member of the Security Council? Would we be in a position to say no to America? Many in Japan are wondering why Japan should be a permanent member of the UN Security Council. For Japanese public opinion, the question of obligations is an overriding consideration," Hatano explained.

"Japan is a great believer in UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali's 'Agenda for Peace'. Japan has a role to play in 'preventive diplomacy' by drawing economic development plans and providing financial aid," said Hatano. Even though Japan is the third largest producer of nuclear power, it is vociferous in promoting nuclear disarmament. "Japan introduced a draft resolution on nuclear disarmament with a view to the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons at the 49th General Assembly of the UN in 1994," the ambassador added.

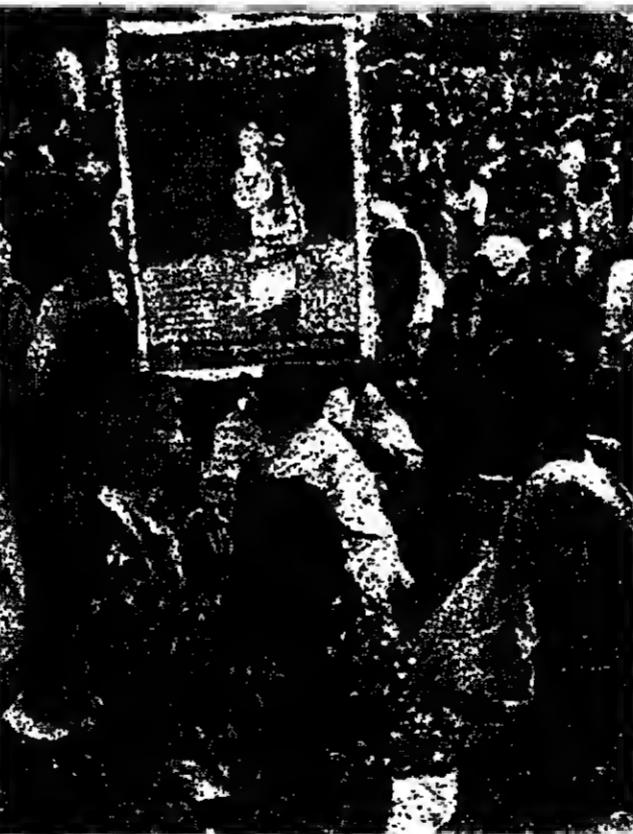
Japan, in conjunction with the UN, has also been active in peace-keeping operations throughout the world. "Japan's first substantial participation in a UN peace-keeping operation was in 1989, when 27 election observers were dispatched to the UN Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in Namibia. Then in 1992, the enactment of the International Peace Cooperation Law enabled Japan to send not only its civilian personnel but also Japan's Self-Defence Forces who were dispatched to assist Rwandan refugees in Goma, Zaire, as part of the international humanitarian relief operations," Hatano said.

"Japan wants to listen to the voice of the three-quarters of the UN member-states which constitute the poorer developing nations of the South," the ambassador explained. "Japan's official development assistance programme now features a Global Issues Initiative on Population and AIDS. This is a seven-year programme designed to provide \$3 billion in aid to developing countries to help them combat AIDS and address population and AIDS-related problems."

Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama represented Japan at the World Summit for Social Development, which took place in the Danish capital Copenhagen in March of 1995. Murayama stressed the importance of developing a "human-centred society," an idea which he said was already taking shape in Japan, and reaffirmed Japan's commitment to promoting education, professional training and technological cooperation, as well as supporting South-South cooperation. It is in this context that he urged the world body to "work expeditiously" to increase the UN Security Council's permanent membership and improve its working method through enhanced transparency."

At the Rio de Janeiro's UN Conference on the Human Environment in 1992, Japan declared its commitment to expand its environment-related official development assistance to between \$7 billion and \$7.75 billion over a five-year period beginning in the fiscal year 1992. It has also channelled considerable funds to the Global Environment Facility (GEF) — an international multilateral funding mechanism affiliated to the UN. In fact, "Japan has pledged to contribute 20 per cent of GEF capital over the next three years," Hatano said. Japan pledged another \$3 billion at the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development, and was instrumental in ensuring the success of these UN-sponsored conferences.

But the Japanese have not forgotten the days when poverty and destruction were pervasive in the war-torn post-World War II period. "Japan has never forgotten the support it received from many members of the international community in building the economic prosperity it enjoys today," said Premier Murayama at the commemorative meeting in New York last October.



"Don't keep them locked in darkness" read a Bengali poster of one of the 200,000 women who demonstrated against poverty and the repression of women in Dhaka (photo: AFP)

## Stairway to saffron success

There is something old hat about pacing corridors of power. Now then someone appears out of the woodwork to upset bidders of the status quo and tamper with the prerogatives of the powers that be. These days it seems that most far-reaching international transformations are Asian in origin or initiative. The message emanating from Asia sounds something like: "Hang up your hat before we take on the job" — and that applies to the running of world bodies, including the United Nations.

It is a small world. Late one winter Manhattan autumn afternoon, I unexpectedly came across a cherished acquaintance in a saffron sari, Ambassador Arundhati Ghose, a former Indian ambassador to Egypt. She showed up, out of the blue, at the UN headquarters and promptly introduced Ambassador Prakash Shah — India's permanent representative to the UN. Ghose, now based in Geneva, was engaged in gruelling negotiations over an extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

India may have received a brush-off for refusing to sign the NPT, but it is widely acknowledged as a world nuclear player. "The NPT is out a treaty," Ambassador Shah told me the next day in his office. "The NPT does not promote the cause of nuclear disarmament. We should work on a convention banning nuclear weapons in the same way as we have done with chemical and biological weapons," he added.

"Nuclear weapons in the hands of nuclear powers are legitimised under the NPT. Nuclear powers go ahead with the possession and production of nuclear weapons. We need negotiations on a convention governing nuclear weapons and in terms of the elimination of nuclear weapons worldwide," Ambassador Shah explained. Ghose agreed. "For India, it remains a question of unrestricted national sovereignty," the sari-clad diplomat said.

The West's failure to recognise this has long enraged India. And, it was partly in this context that the battle over who sets the UN agenda began in earnest in 1995. The triumph of the newly emerging Asian powers over the vested interests of the North in arresting the democratisation process of the UN appears imminent in 1996. India appears poised to do battle — at least as far as the NPT is concerned.

"It is because of the persistence of India at the UN that the question of the total elimination of nuclear weapons has been raised and supported by numerous countries. As a matter of fact, the issue was raised at the Cartagena summit of the NAM [Non-Aligned Movement] countries [last October]. The NAM resolution on the elimination of nuclear weapons has been fully supported by [a majority] at the UN. The unfortunate question of nuclear testing by existing nuclear powers [the five permanent members of the UN Security Council] has been avoided under the NPT," Ambassador Shah said. International peace and security are not lost because there is a new nuclear power, they are secured by the elimination of nuclear weapons, he explained. "India's independent attitude has principles and logic behind it," Shah added.

UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali is of the opinion that stopping nuclear testing is a feasible venture for 1996. "I believe that we will be able next June to have a comprehensive ban on all testing. We have already begun to hold discussions in Geneva with the team working on this subject. I will do whatever ought to be done to accelerate this process. If in June we have

reached an agreement on a comprehensive ban on all testing, I believe that this will be the best contribution the UN can make in the field of environment," Ghali said.

"India was the first country at the UN to initiate a resolution calling for the reform of the world body," Ambassador Shah said. He stressed that India has been especially keen to reform the Security Council, particularly in having the council's character improved so that it is more representative of the General Assembly membership."

"We have an industrial growth rate of over 10 per cent. Our agricultural growth rate is about three per cent. With 950 million people, India is the world's largest democracy and a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-linguistic nation, grappling with varying levels of development in different parts of the country. We have adopted market-oriented economic policies, especially where industry and trade are concerned. The government still has an important role to play in the areas of infrastructure and social services provision," Shah said. But, it is precisely this vast experience as a developing country with enormous social and economic problems that is needed to infuse the UN Security Council with new blood, he pointed out.

One of the most persistent contemporary illusions has been that India's relatively low per capita income — a third of its population still lives below the poverty line — hinders it from playing a more dynamic international role. But, it is partly because of its status as a developing country that India has a critical role to play in international politics.

"China, [another developing country] is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, so why not India? Despite our problems, we have been supporting the UN through our contributions. One doesn't have to be the richest country to help out at the UN. Even the US has serious social problems. It is, indeed, true that we have a 20-30 per cent illiteracy rate but that should not stop India from playing a dynamic role in international affairs. In any case, India is working on improving the living standards of its people," Shah said. Widespread poverty and illiteracy should not be made into an excuse to bar India from being a permanent member of the Security Council, he said.

The fact that India has a large diaspora scattered all over the world is a double-edged sword. "Indians have settled in almost all countries the world over," Shah said. The overseas Indians consider themselves as part of the communities or countries they've settled in. Many are entrepreneurs and invest in the host countries — an investment which they see as an investment in their personal future. Sometimes when the Indian minority is large and economically dominant, then suspicions grow among the host community. But overseas Indians generally contribute to the welfare of the host community and to the well-being of its economy. The Indian diaspora is a bridge between India and the world at large.

"In the [aftermath] of the 50th anniversary celebrations, India believes that the UN should focus on trans-border or trans-national issues such as nuclear disarmament, elimination of nuclear weapons, narcotic traffic, international crime, terrorism, peace and security. Economic growth and development issues should be central to UN activities," Shah said. India's ambassador to the UN also believes that human rights and social issues should get back to the fore of the UN agenda. Social development should get prominence in the context of the work of the UN. "They were sidelined in the past because of the UN's increasing focus on peacekeeping activities," he explained.

India has had diplomatic setbacks. But, "India is climbing, firm of step and dedicated of purpose," Ghosh said. The warning shots some permanent members have fired at suggestions that India secure a seat in the Security Council raise serious concern, not only in India, but throughout the developing world. If a country like India with nearly one billion people and enormous economic and political potential is denied a permanent seat at the Security Council, then what chance do smaller Third World states have?



## Free at last?

National consensus building is never an easy process, especially when nationalist aspirations were marginalised, shunned and rejected by many in the international community. For Yasser Arafat and those Palestinians who will head to the polls on 20 January to elect a president and 88 council members, this moment, in itself, is the primary harbinger for the decided impetus towards a free and democratic state.

But, despite poll results which reveal that 72 per cent of the Palestinians support the Oslo II agreement signed in Washington last September, and that 68 per cent of them indicated they would vote for Arafat in the elections, critics are beginning to voice cries of potential foul play, even before the voting starts.

These naysayers also contend that the scores of rejectionist Palestinians, namely supporters of Hamas and the Popular and Democratic Fronts, will remain under-represented in the new Palestinian Council — an interesting assertion given that four Hamas members, with the blessing of Hamas' spiritual leader, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, are running as "independents".

It is, however, always easy to find fault with such strident moves as forming a government. After all, not everyone will be pleased all of the time. But, a more prudent policy would be to support these steps towards democracy, however small or problematic they may seem.

With sizable post-election obstacles to overcome, the quest for Palestinian self-determination is but a distant goal on the horizon. One source of concern for Arafat are the strong pockets of opposition which could provide Israeli with a much-wanted pretext to stall or stop withdrawal from various cities. Moreover, with donor assistance more likely than not to be halted in the near future, the PNA's massive budget crisis will only be compounded. In all, this augurs a precarious peace in the areas not yet falling within the PNA's expanding borders. For the Palestinians, and other countries in the region, however, the pace of peace could be largely determined by the outcome of the Palestinian Oslo II-inspired endeavours, making with an open mind the best way to view these elections.

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## The Mediterranean's waterworld

Doomsday scenarios of climatic change have led to extravagant solutions for the Mediterranean region. Rushdi Said argues for more respect for nature

Warnings about the impending dangers that will afflict the delta of the Nile in the near future have been circulating for some time. The press has been replete with doomsday scenarios about the imminent inundation of the delta by an encroaching Mediterranean, whose level will rise in response to the thaw of the polar and other ice caps that will come about as a result of global warming. Although the rise in sea level will affect all coastal areas of the world, many have singled out Egypt and Bangladesh as the most vulnerable to this rise, both have large populations living in the delta flats of the Nile and Ganges rivers, which lie barely above sea level. Any rise in sea level will overrun large tracts of land and will chase many millions of people out of their homes.

In addition, the delta, according to one American scientist, is undergoing subsidence, and will, therefore, be inundated at a faster rate. Having drilled and studied a few shallow wells in the northern reaches of the delta, this scientist came up with the conclusion that the delta is subsiding at a very fast rate under the weight of its own sediments and that if this rate continues in the future, disaster will befall Egypt and will dislocate millions of people within the span of the coming 50 years. Although this conclusion is based on evidence that I believe is flawed and contrary to known historical fact, the idea of an impending disaster of such dimensions caught the attention of both the scientific community and the press. After all, getting access to the media or raising funds for scientific research is considerably easier if one boasts sensational results such as these!

Despite their appeal, these dooms-

day scenarios should be treated with caution. Although most scientists would agree that the world will witness a warming trend in the near future as a result of the increased use of fossil fuels, many would judge these scenarios to be highly questionable and would consider the subject of future climatic fluctuations to be dominated by speculation rather than by well-founded argument. Our ability to perfect the necessary modelling and predictive skills in this subject is hampered by the fact that we do not have as yet a comprehensive knowledge of all the factors that determine future trends of the climate. Nevertheless, and whatever the future may bring in the way of climatic fluctuations, one thing is certain and should alleviate our fears: the degree and speed of change in the foreseeable future will be such as to make it manageable. Problems of coastal inundation, shoreline adjustments and riverine flooding in a warmer Egypt will occur, it seems, at rates that can well be managed.

In spite of the fact that there is little that Egypt can do to forestall the impending dangers of an encroaching sea on a subsiding delta, many of the doomsday advocates are advancing ideas to face this situation. Most would advocate the funding of basic research to better understand the phenomenon of global warming, to perfect its modelling and to improve our predictive skills. Others, especially the engineers and contractors, would go a step further and lobby for funds to carry out feasibility studies of giant

structures that could be built to encircle the endangered shore. The most grotesque of all these latter projects is the recently revived project of damming the Gibraltar Strait in order to block the only passage by which the Mediterranean Sea is in free communication with the world ocean system. The damming of the strait would convert the sea into a lake whose waters, according to the project, would be drained into the depressions surrounding its coast in order to lower its level. This way the coastal areas would not only be saved from erosion or inundation, but all countries overlooking the Mediterranean would gain new land as the Mediterranean "lake" level became lower and its shores advanced seaward.

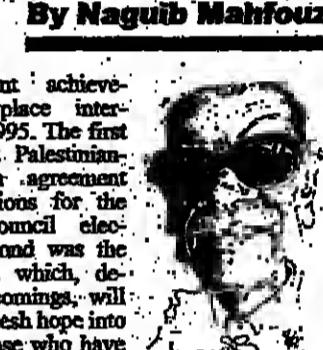
This idea was floated at the beginning of the century by a French visionary and has been picked up lately by the eminent Egyptian architectural engineer Sayed Karim. But if the project had any acceptance at the beginning of the century, it certainly has none today. Today all large artificial structures are looked upon with suspicion, not only because of their impact on the environment but also because of their poor showing in cost-benefit analysis. I know of no international donor or responsible government which would be interested in funding a project of these dimensions, and I doubt that any reputable scientist would find it even worthy of consideration. The world has found out during this century that the impact of such structures on the balance of nature is enormous and detrimental.

In addition, the Gibraltar barrage would be an impossible engineering feat. Its mere dimensions are staggering. It would span 30 kilometres in length and rise more than 320 metres in height. I know of no structure that human beings have ever built that is that high: the Khufu great pyramid is barely half that height. The amount of stone, or fill, that would be required to make this mighty structure would be about 5,000 to 7,000 million cubic metres (compared to a mere 40 million cubic metres for the Aswan High Dam). In case the advocates of the project have missed the problems here, an inspection of the configuration of the strait's bottom shows the shallowest point to be on the high ridge (dubbed "sill" in oceanographic terminology) which separates the deeps of the Atlantic and the Mediterranean and is 320 metres deep. The width of the strait at this point is about 30 Kilometres.

In addition, the building of a barrage here would have far-reaching effects on the entire Mediterranean region. It would prevent the free exchange of water between the Mediterranean sea and the Atlantic, since the more saline and heavier surface waters of the sea would sink and remain at the bottom, having been prevented from moving across the sill to the Atlantic to be replaced by a surface flow from that ocean. The result would be a more saline environment which would ultimately decimate the entire marine life of the sea. The lowering of the sea level would also cause the rivers flowing

The writer is a US-based professor of geology and former chairman of the Egyptian Organisation for Geological Surveying.

## 1995 reviewed



By Naguib Mahfouz

Two important achievements took place internationally in 1995. The first was the latest Palestinian-Israeli interim agreement and preparations for the Palestinian Council elections. The second was the Bosnian truce, which, despite its shortcomings, will at least inject fresh hope into the lives of those who have been under threat of destruction over the last few years.

Following on from these events come prospects for an agreement between Israel and Syria, this after many years of deadlock. Israel had previously failed to display an inclination for an agreement, and the Syrians had not shown much enthusiasm for one that failed to guarantee the return of the Golan Heights.

However, in the last few months of 1995 Israel seemed to realise the importance of peace with Syria, thereby demonstrating a conviction that peace in the region would remain fragmentary so long as the circle was incomplete.

Syria showed exceptional flexibility when it agreed to negotiate with Israel without a prior Israeli commitment to specific conditions.

Last year offered real opportunities towards the achievement of the kind of comprehensive peace that has long been overdue in the region. The important question now is whether these opportunities can be exploited further this year.

The two main negative features of the past year were terrorism and natural disaster. The attempted assassination of President Mubarak was a serious incident despite its unexpectedly positive consequences: popular protest against the attempt amounted to a vindication of the President's popularity and of the people's affection towards him. The bombing of the Egyptian embassy in Pakistan struck at the heart of the nation.

Last year's natural disasters seem to supply the moral that our negligence was, to a large extent, responsible for the losses incurred: I am referring here to the recent train crash disaster, the worst of its kind in Egyptian history. In this instance, we cannot lay the blame on fate alone, since the human role in the incident should not be underestimated either.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salama.

## The Press This Week

By Hassan Fouad

ROUND-UPS of 1995 and predictions for 1996 featured in most of the nation's press this week. Al-Masrawi published a photo-montage on its cover, dubbing it the most important picture of 1996. The montage depicts Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad sitting with Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, and surrounded by US President Clinton, President Mubarak, King Hussein, Lebanese President Hrawi and Head of the Palestinian National Authority Yasser Arafat.

Inside, Editor-in-Chief Makram Mohamed Ahmed, wrote: "The outstanding feature of this year is that it may be the year for a comprehensive peace settlement. There is a good chance that Assad will shake hands with Peres, beginning a new phase in the Middle East peace process".

Makram Mohamed Ahmed

that this will happen in 1996 since Shimon Peres is serious in his quest for peace with Syria and desires a comprehensive peace with the Arabs. He would like to see a new Middle East order in which Israel would have a special place, peacefully co-existing with its neighbours. But Peres faces an Israeli society which is divided over the issue of peace and hawks in the military and government who may hinder their stances on the pretext that Israel

Illogical that hostilities between the Arabs and Israel should come to an end while differences between Arab states continue. And it is also illogical that the deterioration in Iraq should continue to reach a desperate state of hunger for the Iraqi people and a state of division which threatens the unity of that nation".

Rose El-Yasseri's predictions for 1996 include: a limited Egyptian cabinet reshuffle which will involve 6-8 ministers and a larger number of governors; tension between Egypt and Sudan next summer; the promulgation of a new press law after the deletion of the imprisonment clause and the retention of fines; the disengagement of the national foot-ball team upon return from Johannesburg; the defeat of the Egyptian sports mission to Atlanta; President Hafez Al-Assad as star of the year after signing an agreement with Israel in autumn and receiving the Nobel Peace Prize at the end of the year; the breakdown of the Bosnia peace accord; Tansu Ciller's declining popularity; and the weakening of the yen against the dollar.

Editor-in-Chief Mahmood

El-Tehani wrote an article entitled "1996 — Strengthening peace with democracy", in which he said, "With the advent of a final peace settlement in the Middle East, we should ask: 'What next? Have we really achieved peace?' I do not think so. Achieving peace, in my opinion, means getting rid of the notion of total hostility towards democratic political groups who differ in opinion with the government".

In Al-Ahram, Salama Ahmed wrote in his daily column, under the title "50 years in vogue", that the world during 1995 celebrated the 50th anniversary of three important events: the drop of the atomic bomb on Japan, the end of the Second World War and the creation of the United Nations. He said: "After 50 years the world has failed to stop nuclear testing, supersize Nazi and Fascist groups, close down concentration camps, or prevent ethnic cleansing. There is no solution to the problems the United Nations was created to solve. As a result, 50 years of human experience have passed in vain — the threat of nuclear war remains, racism and tor-

ture camps remain and the principles of international justice have not been attained." On the occasion of the start of the newly-elected People's Assembly term, under the headline "Our rights", Ahmed Ragab wrote in his front-page weekly column in Akhbar El-Yom: "Since the People's Assembly has approved the televising of its sessions, it is my right to see sessions in full rather than bits and pieces. It is my right to see the speaker read out the names of the absentees and set those who attend, it is my right to see the voting procedure and my right to demand the activation of the board which shows the number of those present, those in approval and those who oppose as well as those who abstain. It is my right to see the deputy I voted for. Does he stand for the people or is he merely a tool to pass the government's laws? Does he cast his vote in

On the back page of Akhbar El-Yom, Mustafa Amin wrote in his column, "The Egyptian press has become a vulnerable target — every Tom, Dick and Harry wants to file a suit against a journalist in order to imprison him. Is it not enough that we have to contend with the new press law? Now everyone who wants his name published by the news agencies files a suit against a journalist."

"Talk about peace with Israel should be accompanied by talk about an Arab rapprochement. It is illogical that hostilities between the Arabs and Israel should come to an end while differences between Arab states continue".

Ragab El-Banna

دعاكم

**Close up**

Salama A. Salama

**Democratic transition 1995—1996**

Last year the world witnessed a number of important electoral battles in a great number of countries, East and West, and equally this year will witness a number of no less significant electoral battles, especially in the West. These contests may well lead to international change in a variety of directions, thus affecting a number of current issues and regional balances of power. Whether they took place in 1995, or will take place in 1996, these elections will certainly govern change in the world political arena until the end of this century and well into the next one.

It is worth noting, however, that the elections that took place last year did not have a decisive impact on the process of democratization in the world. This has been the case in Egypt as in Russia, Turkey and Algeria.

In Egypt, the overwhelming majority of parliamentary seats remained in the hands of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) — limiting the space available for opposition and party pluralism. In Russia, political forces were so fragmented that none was able to win a sufficient majority to enable it to change the status quo. And despite the Communist Party obtaining a larger number of seats, real power remains in the hands of President Yeltsin. In Turkey, change came in the opposite direction, as the success of the Islamic Raffah Party at the elections has put the whole secularist regime in jeopardy, with all the consequences this may hold for the country to 1996.

In Poland, though the new Communists have managed to achieve a substantial victory, this will, nevertheless, have to be coupled with a deal of adaptation on the part of the current Polish government if the country is to meet the challenges of political and economic changes. These will come as the consequence of the Poles' ambition to join mainstream Europe and its various institutions, a cause that the former Communist parties have made their own.

In Algeria, the presidential elections have helped to create a breathing space, to some extent, which may aid in finding a solution to the Algerian dilemma. The elections also clearly showed the extent to which the Algerian people have become fed up with political violence in all its forms. Nevertheless, this positive result may quickly evaporate; if no rapid action in the direction of stability, and to put an end to violence and terrorism is taken, then the positive gains of the election may well be lost.

The electoral battles scheduled for 1996 are expected to be decisive: top of the list here is the American presidential election, which is already exerting preliminary pressures. Parallel to these, the general elections in Israel, where for the first time the prime minister will be elected on a separate ticket, are equally significant. Needless to say both campaigns will have definite impact on the advance of the peace process in the Middle East and on the stability of the region.

In a few days time the world will witness the first elections for a Palestinian Legislative Council. A president for the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) will also be elected by direct ballot. And, again, it goes without saying that the world will judge the Palestinian democratic experience, and, for that matter, the whole democratic process in the Arab World, by comparison with how the elections are conducted in Israel.

As for what 1996 holds for Western Europe, the 1995 French elections were an important indication as far as the results of other elections in other European countries in the future are concerned. In Spain, the ruling Socialist Party is set to enter a fierce battle that threatens its continuing rule; in Italy, the domestic situation, which gets more complicated by the day, may well see early elections, and these will come at the same time as Italy holds the presidency of the European Union. In Britain, the prime minister, John Major, is facing problems that may lead him to announce general elections before their scheduled date. If we add to this list the presidential elections in Russia, which will decide both the fate of Yeltsin and the future of the economic reform programme, then the one sure prediction that we can make is that in 1996 the world will see many new faces and many new directions.

**Whither the future?**

Ismail Sabri Abdallah hails an initiative intended to combat a dearth of future scenarios

What will Egypt look like in the year 2020? Surely we need an image of where we want to be in the future to assess what is going on now, and what should be done, in the national economy and in society as a whole. But, till now we have had only comparisons with Nasser's revolutionary period, with Sadat's *Imtak* and with a sometimes fictitious image of Farouk's regime. But what we undertake today will affect not the past but the future.

Some actions can be obviously commendable in the short or medium term and become disastrous in the long term. A good example is the case of housing in Greater Cairo. In the fifties the government invested heavily in social housing. This eased the crisis provoked by the arrest of building during the World War II. But to the longer term this investment increased the full effect of emigration from rural areas to the capital. Doing more of the same placed Cairo on the short list of ungovernable megropolises.

Yet Egypt has the means of building alternative scenarios for its future. The expertise is available and waits only to be mobilized. No list of good wishes can ever, after all, be a replacement for the kind of concrete scientific endeavour made possible thanks to progress in informatics and modelling.

The good news is that a group of research

workers gathered by the Third World Forum is currently preparing a major project called Egypt 2020. The preliminary phase includes setting a provisional list of national long term goals, identifying constraints, planning the study of present prevailing trends in all sectors, selecting appropriate models, setting a timetable and budget schedule and budget.

It is, of course, impossible and completely useless to define goals in monetary terms. In the first place there is an absence of a stable referential currency. Yet on the other hand it would be sensible to provide a list of development projects for implementation during the coming 25 years. What the project aims to produce is a set of feasible scenarios among which the decision maker is able to choose. Scientific research in this area aims only at enlightening the politicians, increasing options and showing the positive and negative consequences of each option.

It is important to this process that human and sustainable development aspects are retained. Every Egyptian child must be able to fulfil its physical and mental growth needs; illiteracy, actual and functional, must be

eradicated; job opportunities must be created for every citizen able and willing to work; individuals must be provided with at least six square metres of covered habitation; the plight of the very poorest members of society must be alleviated.

To achieve these targets an average rate of economic growth of at least six per cent is needed — i.e. a rate at least three times higher than projected demographic growth. There is nothing shocking in this rate. It was achieved by Egypt in the early sixties and late seventies. Some developing countries realised an average of eight to ten per cent over long periods. Our choice of six per cent is prudent if not a bit conservative. Yet it is necessary to address the base of all development: namely population and natural resources.

It is a commonplace that politicians justify their limited success by pretending that the population growth "swallows" most of the benefits of economic growth. In Egypt this has ceased to be a valid argument. Since the late sixties Egypt has been located on the descending part of the demographic transition

curve. According to World Bank figures, the birthrate declined from 40 per thousand in 1970 to 31 per thousand in 1992. The most significant demographic indicator is the fertility rate; it was 3.9 in 1970 and 3.8 in 1992. The expected rate of population growth in 2000 is estimated at 1.7 per cent, which will fall to 1.5 per cent, to be on a par with levels in South Korea and Argentina.

We have limited natural resources. Land suitable for reclamation does not exceed 2 million feddans, and some of it is of very poor quality. Water supply is even worse.

According to international treaties, it entitled to 55.8 billion cubic metres from the Nile, a figure that might decrease if Ethiopia embarks on large scale irrigation projects.

(80 per cent of the Nile water that reaches Egypt comes from the Ethiopian plateau.) As for minerals, except for iron the country has no significant deposits of any metal.

Oil will become too expensive to extract around 2017. Natural gas is more abundant, provided it is not exported. The quantity of extractable coal in Sinai is negligible by international standards. People remain our only

mine of wealth. People, then, must be educated and trained.

Egypt is currently exporting its educated and skilled "excess labour" as a raw material. The \$6 billion in workers' remittances is presently the major source of foreign currency, but the other side of the coin is that there is no addition to productive assets corresponding to this revenue. In the National Accounts system the \$6 billion does not figure in gross domestic product (GDP) but in the gross national product (GNP). And as with any raw material, the country of origin would reap the greatest benefits if it also undertook the processing.

One can only raise the productivity of labour through advancing human development. Egypt 2020 can only point out a pathway, producing insights into how manufacturing and inter-sectoral relations are directed vis-à-vis correlated technological change.

But hopefully Egypt 2020 will attract the attention of other research centres and incite them to embark on the business of scanning the future across all sectors in an attempt to plot Egypt's socio-economic matrix of Egypt.

*The writer is head of the Third World Forum and former minister of planning.*

**Too early to celebrate**

Looking back at 1995, Hassan Nafa'a argues that the era of American peace may prove very short

Events in 1995 have further revealed trends at both regional and international levels. We have only to recall the decisive crisis created by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 to realise that a new epoch in the development of the international and Middle-East systems is in the making. The broad lines of this epoch were, to a great extent, carved out by the way in which the Gulf crisis was

settled. At that time, in 1990, the slogan of the "New World Order" was one which resonated from one end of the world to the other, and was on the lips of all world leaders. The United Nations Security Council, like some *jinn* that had finally been released from the long captivity of the Cold War, was now free, and could solemnly declare that the latter struggle was over. The United States, the largest debtor to the United Nations, and one which had for many years shown its disdain for the organisation and had waged a fierce war against it, exercising manifold political and financial pressures, was suddenly zealous to pay its arrears.

Within this context, many believed that the New World Order meant that the United Nations was on the way to taking into its hands the reins of global administration, giving force to the principles and standards enunciated in its charter. This belief, however, turned out to represent the tip of a rather different iceberg, the truth of the matter, or rather the hidden mass of the iceberg in question, was that the United States rather than the United Nations was to hold the reins of global administration. The United States held all the threads necessary to implement its policies, pulling the relevant ones when the Gulf crisis developed, mobilising forces, distributing costs and assigning roles. A voiceless debate seemed to be taking place between "idealists", who had aspired to a new world led by the United Nations, and "realists", who had intuitively realised that we were at the threshold of a New World Order dominated by the United States.

Over the years 1990-1995, much

was said about the collapse of the Old World Order, and the growth of the embryonic new one, which, however, is still to be born. And now, at the start of 1996, no green shoot has appeared in the debris. The United Nations celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in a sad and sombre atmosphere; manifestations of joy were severely curtailed by the financial constraints that are threatening the organisation with virtual bankruptcy. Its latest peace-keeping task has been a fiasco.

The expectation that 1995 would witness the rejuvenation of the United Nations evaporated, and the year instead proved to be the very embodiment of the organisation's failure. Instead of being a year of advance, 1995 was one of repeated withdrawals, first from Somalia and then from Bosnia, and this latter was not an honourable withdrawal. The UN's unfulfilled peacekeeping role was swiftly filled by the United States.

Possibly because 1995 was an election year in the USA, it was a year of peace agreements that bore

the seal of the United States. The list of agreements includes those affecting the Middle East, the Balkans and Northern Ireland. This "American peace", however, does not necessarily carry with it the implication of stability nor a promise for the well-being of mankind. Violence is still being exercised in many places, and is taking on new forms and using different weapons. Violence, in fact, has been the most remarkable phenomenon of the year, and one which has been a global rather than an Arab or a regional phenomenon.

The Oklahoma bombing in the United States, the Supreme Truth murders on Japan's underground and similar incidents in London attest to this truth. More recently, the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin, and the attempt on the life of President Mubarak are among a series of attempts on the lives of world leaders, which even Clinton and Mandela did not completely escape.

While violence may have subsided a little with the recent peace achieve-

ments, the withdrawal of Israel from Palestinian towns, and the resumption of Israeli-Syrian negotiations, these have not been enough to ease tensions. In fact new areas of tension are surfacing. In Saudi Arabia, a recent series of acts of violence have targeted the Saudi regime as much as they have targeted the US presence in the peninsula.

The conflict that has spread from Al-Bab Al-Ahmar over the island of Bab Al-

Mandeb in the Gulf smacks of Israeli manipulation. And the fragility of the Egyptian-Israeli peace became

apparent once again during the prob

lems attendant on the renewal of the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty over the Israeli nuclear programme. A deeply set hatred was expressed in the conf

ession of an Israeli war veteran who admitted having killed Egyptian pri

sons of war in the 1956 and 1967 wars. Fear and tension mounted once again at the American Congress' de

cision to transfer the US Embassy in

Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem,

and at Israel's tireless reiteration that "Jerusalem was the united eternal capital of Israel".

While events themselves confirm the truth that we are living in the epoch of an US rather than an UN peace, other events seem to give some further clue as to the future. At the global level, a turn in the tide can be foreseen in Russia and in the eastern European countries, where communist political parties seem to be making a come-back. At the regional level, the success of the Rafah Islamic Party in Turkey in winning a majority of the seats in parliament is significant. Such events would seem to insinuate that socialist-democratic regimes may be sprouting from the ruins of socialist and Soviet ones. "Moderate" Islamic parties seem to be on the rise in the Middle East and in the Islamic world in general. If such a turn in events is already to be seen at the end of 1995, it might be interpreted to mean that the epoch of the "American peace" could be shorter than many have expected.

*The writer is professor of political science at Cairo University.*

**To The Editor****Misrepresented**

Sir - I was surprised to see my statements misrepresented to the article entitled, "Terrorism tops 1995 events" (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 28 December-3 January).

The correct statement was, "The government, afraid of stretching the space of freedom allowed for the press, had to put restrictions to curb such freedoms as easily as possible. Such freedom was considered by the government as an abuse."

I would be very grateful if you could publish this correction.

Dr Hoda Badran

Chairperson

Affiance for Arab Women

**No audience**

Sir - In his weekly column "Plain Talk" (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 7-13 December), Mursi Saad El-Din expressed concern

as far as the results of other elections in other European countries in the future are concerned.

In Spain, the ruling Socialist Party is set to enter a fierce battle that threatens its continuing rule; in Italy, the domestic situation, which gets more complicated by the day, may well see early elections, and these will come at the same time as Italy holds the presidency of the European Union.

In Britain, the prime minister, John Major, is facing problems that may lead him to announce general elections before their scheduled date. If we add to this list the presidential elections in Russia, which will decide both the fate of Yeltsin and the future of the economic reform programme, then the one sure prediction that we can make is that in 1996 the world will see many new faces and many new directions.

Another example is the gala concert given to the Sayed Darwish theatre on 8

December 1995, in Alexandria. There was also no mention of the concert in any of the papers. It was only by sheer luck that we knew about the gala concert. The theatre was nearly empty and we know quite a few people who would have loved to attend had they been aware of the concert. What a tragedy that such excellent singers and musicians had to perform for nearly no audience.

Urfa Kremann

Jan Reinwald

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**A children's Weekly**

Sir - I was elated when I read about *Al-Ahram Weekly*'s offer for a monthly or annual subscription. I look forward to every issue of the paper, but sometimes, it is very difficult to find it.

So, as a teacher of English, I hurried to tell our headmaster about this offer. He agreed to subscribe in order to use the paper as a resource for our classes' current events wall magazine.

Let me suggest that you publish an English language children's magazine or newspaper to introduce children to English at an early age. Such a publication would benefit both children and teachers who use the paper for resource material. I hope you consider our suggestion.

Abeer Karouni  
Refaa Al-Tahtawi School  
Shareqya

**Reflections By Hani Shukrallah****A booming voice falls silent**

He was possibly one of the least diplomatic of diplomats to have served in the Egyptian Foreign Ministry. Confrontational, uncompromising, possessed of a loud booming voice and very little respect for authority, Councillor Anas Mustafa Kamel was also a graduate of what one may call "politically call the 'Class of '72' — that trouble-making group of nationalist-cum-left wing student activists who in the early 1970s were convinced they had every right to tell President Sadat what to do, and in the process save the country from national humiliation, foreign domination, injustice and authoritarianism.

My friend and classmate Anas Mustafa Kamel, 42, died of a sudden heart attack this week in Beirut, where he was serving on the staff of the Egyptian Embassy. A graduate of Cairo University's Faculty of Economics and Political Science (1974), he was among the most brilliant scholars to have come out of this elite college. As a student, he took his political science studies more seriously than most of us, and was deeply interested in the history of Arab political thought. My earliest recollections of him during our university days were his booming voice, the huge volumes befted under his arm, and the image of him standing in the faculty corridors, arguing, almost always, heatedly.

It took time for Anas to "settle down". He spent nearly a decade after graduation suing the Foreign Ministry and writing prolifically. Having passed the Foreign Ministry's grueling entrance exams with flying colours, the ministry had then refused to take him for "security considerations", namely his record of student activism. None of his friends, and I suspect even Anas himself, took the court case he initiated against the ministry very seriously. We appreciated the ouisance value of the case, but few believed that a former student activist and on-going trouble-maker could be allowed into the highly polished corridors of Egyptian diplomacy.

Meanwhile, Anas did little to endear himself to the powers that be. He published in the weekly *Rase El-Youssef*, in Al-Ahram's international politics quarterly journal, *Al-Siyassa Al-Dawla*, and its weekly economic magazine, *Al-Ahram Al-Iqtissadi*, and took part in several research projects of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies. The series he wrote on the history of Jewish capitalism in Egypt was a cover story in *Al-Ahram Al-Iqtissadi* for several weeks, and triggered intense debate. His published books and studies on post-revolutionary Iran are considered by many to be among the most authoritative

# While ye may

Cairo Symphony Orchestra; New Year's Concert; Cairo Symphony Orchestra; Yvonne Barclay, soprano; Ahmed El-Saeid, conductor; Moin Hall, Cairo Opera House; 31 December

What do you feel about the Blue Danube and New Year's Eve? At this time every year they are bracketed together for many people in Cairo. Danube, new year, nostalgia for the past year, hope and hopes for the coming one. Add the city of Vienna and the dish is irresistibly rich and glamorous.

Vienna stages such a ball every New Year's Eve in the Staatsoper. It is as much a part of the city as the river itself. The Danube means Vienna and Vienna means music. The magic knot is formed.

The ceremony has been repeated in Cairo in somewhat reduced circumstances by the Austrian Cultural Centre. It is a festival of the Danube on the Nile. It has become almost as popular as football viewing. It has everything — the lovely Cairo Opera House of spacious vistas, the Cairo Symphony Orchestra and its conductor Ahmed El-Saeid and usually a star soprano in festive frills with flowers galore in banks on and around the big stage. The atmosphere envelops and throws itself recklessly at the chilly Cairo audience but the courage pays off. The audience is huge and it really claps. And at the end, when El-Saeid lets things rip with Strauss's *Radetzky March*, this collection of what is almost a cross-section of the Cairo public lets its hair down. The minicoated and bejewelled men boys in shirt sleeves and all get to their feet and root as if for a ruger match.

Will it all go on forever? These two river cities have only their rivers in common. They have swallowed up every power that has sought to occupy them with irresistible irony. In the end they are related to nothing but themselves. They have a unique historical human presence — living, not nostalgic, Nile and Danube, musical souls.

There was more soul than usual at the latest of these concerts. From the rosee cabin of a stage framed in red flowers and velvet curtains, the Cairo Symphony Orchestra gave a warm and stylish flow of sound to the *Fledermaus* overture and the *Wiener Blut* waltz. The two opening pieces were followed by a sad, strong song from Johann Strauss' seldom heard operetta *Indigo*.

The evening's soprano, Scot Yvonne Barclay, sang this song with a bright, light tone and then followed it with something completely different, *Meine Herr Marquis*, a showpiece of the boudoir in *Die Fledermaus*. Like all Strauss this is bright and brilliant. And Barclay has both these qualities. She is breezy and confident, and has a voice that gets fuller as it rises to high tones.

After the *Perpetuum Mobile* of Strauss, the soprano sang Karl Zeller's song about the roses of Tyrol. This needed a fuller voice in the middle than Barclay possesses. But she knows so well how to put these operetta pieces over — and they are ex-



Yvonne Barclay

tremely difficult to sing — that she sounded authentically Viennese which is what the evening was about. Almost the best known of all waltzes, *Tales from the Vienna Woods*, then came, played with a soft, silken tone. The Cairo Symphony Orchestra did well in catching its sunset, languishing, end-of-era sadness.

These waltzes go on and on, defying time, history and repetition. You can tire of almost all music if it goes through the grind of over exposure, but not, it seems, of these waltzes. Even Mahler loses his patina if mimed by constant use. The *Vienna Woods*, it is apparent, keeps its freshness in spite of not being so green anymore. Was

the Danube ever blue? But both green and blue join to make a great city of Vienna.

As you listen to the Cairo Symphony Orchestra, under El-Saeid, going through Strauss, the murky side of the Danube-Vienna story seldom appears: the dark world of Mayerling and how empires are made to work, Freud and his surrounding painters, poets and playwrights. Baron Ochs of *Rosenkavalier* waltzing through a scatalogical nightmare, all are kept under wraps. The Danube can be icy and dark, but never in Strauss. Who cares about the shadows when the froth on the top is so ravishing? That is, if you like the waltz. There are

another one coming. We can only sink once but the Danube will always be there.

The bright coloured streamers soap in the air from well-wishers on the wharf. Our last contact with the land of yesteryear is gone. And El-Saeid and his band thump out the Strauss *Radetzky March*. The members of the big audience have their moment. They stand to clap as the military rhythms thunder on. Where is the Cairo Opera House? In Vienna or Budapest? And in what era? Is it all to begin again as before? Or...?

The applause continues — enjoyment, pleasure, release. Plenty. Enough. Happy New Year.

## Art

### Exorcising the everyday



Advice, one privileged moment among many

often, in imminent danger of floating away. Apart from the two large 'studies' of faces — *The Victim* and *The Guard* — form is seldom articulated via paint, which is applied, more often than not, as backdrop. Colour, which bleeds, which is made to bleed by dripping water onto the still wet paint, resolves into form only after the drawing of outlines. And the outlines, given the ordering of El-Sawi's method — colour, water, line — are contingent. They hold together, as much as it can be held, a protoplasmic evanescence that is thus made to describe form.

El-Sawi's method of painting mitigates against density. His subjects have little in the way of solidity, and though they are constrained in seemingly small spaces they seem

heart. It can be descriptive of detail, as in *Rembrandt* and *Leonardo*, where the two figures are distinguished only by details of costume, Rembrandt by his complicated Dutch collar and cavalier hat. Leonardo by his simple, Renaissance décolleté. But it can also complicate the reading of details, as in *The Tracer* — an image reminiscent of Blake — where the crushed human figure is made slightly more complex by a confusing proliferation of limbs.

Line can also be used to create something out of nothing: to *Watching the Sky* it imposes a human figure on what is otherwise a muted colour field. Combined with the fortuitous juxtaposition of colour, and a well-chosen title, it acts as post-event rationalisation in

*The Smile*. In *Daily Dance* this process is reversed, with the actual stuff of the paint beginning to make out of something. Beneath a table lamp of massive proportion and proto-Cubist perspective, the dancing figure performs, looking for all the world like one of those pirouetting dancers found in musical boxes. Only her head disintegrates into nothing more than smears of paint. A little bit of Bacon goes a long, long way.

There is continuity in Adel El-Sawi's work, with many of the paintings in the current show utilising the techniques and themes of earlier exhibitions. *Italo*, a large townscape, appears as an attempt to synthesise those earlier concerns, as the still life imitates on the cityscape. Perspectives are dis-

torted, allowing the impression of futurist explosion. The solidity of architecture is subverted by a fragmented dynamism — a clue here, perhaps, to the origin of extra limbs. And foregrounded, or foregrounded as much as is possible in such a vortex, two objects from a table top still life sit alone in a space far more ambiguous, if less metaphysically loaded, than a de Chirico pizza.

But if anything can be said to dominate the current exhibition, it is the human form, no matter how dissolve. Strangely, that form proves remarkably difficult to sex unless the most blatant signifiers are on display. The dancer in *Daily Dance* we know is female, not because she is wearing a dress, but because the dress is lifted up in an erotic little can. The figure in the *Snakescharmer* is male, because this is a frontal pose, and we are invited to speculate on the significance of the relationship between the snakes that frame the nude and the snakescharmer's own phallus. The figure in *In the Port* is harder to read. One feels that it must be a sailor, should indeed be a sailor, because there is a ship in the background, a grey mass floating on a deep celestial blue. And then, of course, one notices. The figure is wearing trousers and, the androgyny of the torso notwithstanding, is in Cocteau-esque pose. His arm reaches across his thigh. The figure is male, and a sailor to boot. His moment of epiphany is no doubt on its way.

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other dances, but none so alluring to hear or see.

After the intermission came Strauss polkas and swirling variations thereon. And then Lehar, the genius who, in his melody, paints the lot — the entire world of the River Danube, the falling stars and shooting fireworks, coalesce into a sheer poetry of despair which so beguiles listeners that they never better to catch the message: before you end the world with a war first read the silks and satins of prophecy floating in a chill wind.

In the songs that came in this part of the concert Yvonne Barclay was only partially successful. Pity the soprano who must exercise the haunting power of Schwarzkopf and Welitsch. Not easy ground from which to sing. When Barclay sang Lehar's *Mitte Lippes*, the morbidezza was missing. (The term morbidezza is not exact in this context, though it is the only word which catches the strangeness of songs which mix recollection of the past with the present and gild the lot with a sound exactly commensurate to the collapse of an entire world.) Lehar's music clings to us like the garment of an unwanted skin. In spite of the elegance, it frightens us with beauty.

The "hot lips" waltz is sality. The merry widow, as given by Barclay, skates merrily but knowingly over the thin ice of the fading empire, the Danube and the entire uneasy edifice of Europe. In her black and purple dresses by Worth, she is an angel of unearthly amummication, out just a soprano with a sexy swirl to the voice.

Her best showing of the evening was in the most inspiring song from Lehar's *Paganini*. This music came after the deluge of the 1914 War and its aftermath. It is a poignant cry for help. The party and the deluge are over, but the people are still beautiful and do their best to keep up surfaces. Barclay showed her quality and how — in spite of the lack of big waves of gorgeous tactile tones — she knew the heart of the music and demonstrated it. And this was the heart of the concert. One cannot ask for more.

And then came the decorations. Bye Blue Danube. Our vessel is pulling out from the departure wharf. Another journey gone to the past and another one coming. We can only sink once but the Danube will always be there.

The bright coloured streamers soap in the air from well-wishers on the wharf. Our last contact with the land of yesteryear is gone. And El-Saeid and his band thump out the Strauss *Radetzky March*. The members of the big audience have their moment. They stand to clap as the military rhythms thunder on. Where is the Cairo Opera House? In Vienna or Budapest? And in what era? Is it all to begin again as before? Or...?

The applause continues — enjoyment, pleasure, release. Plenty. Enough. Happy New Year.

David Blake gathers roses on thin ice

## Listings

### EXHIBITIONS

General Exhibition  
Zamalek Arts Centre, 1 Al-Mashhad Al-Sawadi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 7pm-10pm. Until 5 Jan.

The Egypt of The Past  
Egyptian Culture Centre, 3 Al-Shukh Al-Khalili St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6795. Daily 10am-1pm & 5pm-10pm. Until 5 Jan.

Photography exhibition of moments and landscapes from the archives of Alberto Moncada and the Egyptian Museum of Torino.

Adel El-Sawi (Paintings)  
Masrabiya Gallery, 3 Chamberlain St, Downtown, Tel 778 0253. Daily exc Fri, 11am-3pm. Until 1 Jan.

Recent works by a leading contemporary artist.

Happy Sunday (Photographs)  
French Cultural Centre, Mounira Damas, 1 Madrasat Al-Haqqa Al-Farwaniya St, Mounira. Tel 353 2725. Daily exc Sun, 10am-2pm & 5pm-6pm. Until 1 Jan.

Josef Polleres  
Cairo Photo Gallery, 17 Youssef Al-Gadid St, Bob Al-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Daily 10am-1pm & 5pm-10pm. Until 1 Jan.

Photographs under the title Egypt, Land Under The Black Sun.

Omar Hilmi (Photographs)  
Lobby of the Jumeirah Center, 4 UC, Al-Shukh Rihab St, Tel 354 2968. Daily 9am-9pm. Until 15 Jan.

Hassan Ali Ahmed (Paintings)  
Salam Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mokattam. Tel 346 3242. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2.30pm & 5.30pm-9pm. Until 18 Jan.

Abdel-Mouslim Ma'awad (Paintings)  
Al-Salam, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown, Tel 353 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Rivoli II, as above.

Monkey Trouble  
Al-Harara, 15 Al-Harara St, Giza. Tel 355 555353. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Waterworld  
Metrop. 33 Talaat Harb St, Downtown, Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Until 15 Jan.

Al-Gamal (Paintings)  
Al-Salam, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown, Tel 353 6562. Daily 10am-1pm & 5.30pm-9.30pm. Until 15 Jan.

Al-Gamal (Photographs)  
Al-Salam, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown, Tel 353 6562. Daily 10am-1pm & 5.30pm-9.30pm. Until 15 Jan.

St. George (Paintings)  
Al-Salam, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown, Tel 353 6562. Daily 10am-1pm & 5.30pm-9.30pm. Until 15 Jan.

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Al-Salam, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown, Tel 353 6562.





Learning can be fun: these children discover on their first visit to the new museum. Here they can ask questions and find the answers without memorising long lessons



photos: Jihan Ammar



## Supermarket

As a child, I was never introduced to the joys of shopping at a supermarket. We had our favourite grocer, greengrocer and butcher. We bought our cold cuts from Lappas, our sweets from Grappi. The idea of finding everything under the same roof was not a familiar concept.

The first real supermarket I visited was in Athens, on our way to Australia a few years after I married. My first encounter with such a place was rather momentous. I was in awe. So was my daughter, barely three at the time. When asked what she wanted she became mildly hysterical: "Everything," she finally said. I understood her frustration. Neither of us had been used to this display of hundreds of brands, of thousands of goods packaged to catch the eye. One felt alien, like travellers in a country where we did not understand the language, strangers: non-consumers who did not "belong".

Observing the shoppers piling boxes, cartons, bottles and sundry objects into their carts at top speed, I wondered: How could they make decisions so quickly?

As soon as I settled into my new home, however, I mastered the art of supermarket shopping. I learned to read labels, compare prices, and distrust advertisements. I made a number of mistakes at first but in no time I was getting maximum value for my money.

Within a few years, though, supermarkets completely lost their appeal. I joined a group of health-conscious mothers who advocated only natural food. We went on expeditions deep into the countryside to buy fruit, vegetables, homemade cheeses and goat's milk. We bought stone-ground flour, oats and wild rice by the sack. We sweetened our home-made deserts with pure honey bought from the little old man who kept bees. I made my own yoghurt and baked brown bread. My kitchen looked every bit like an Egyptian kitchen. There I was, on the other side of the world, chopping greens and hunting for farms whose chickens ranged freely, just to buy a few eggs. Home delivery was out of the question, convenience food abhorred; and if by chance I gave in to facility and walked into a supermarket, I would look behind me first to make sure none of the other mothers saw me. Back home, I would destroy the tell-tale package.

My children grew up neither more nor less healthy than children who, were fed on hamburgers and corn flakes. They were immensely more frustrated, though. They craved soft drinks, sticky sweets, ice cream and potato chips. The home-made varieties simply did not measure up. The problem was compounded by TV advertisements and the sight of brightly illuminated supermarkets and milk bars that beckoned at every street corner. They enthusiastically accepted invitations while their friends visited only reluctantly. My older daughter once came home very excited. She had been invited to lunch at her friend's house to celebrate the arrival of a new baby. "What is so special?" I wanted to know. "You just had a baby sister." She looked at me with all the resentment in the world: "It is not the same thing," she said. "ours was home-made!"

At this point I thought that maybe a happier balance had to be achieved. With a heavy heart I introduced some items carefully selected off the shelves of a "good" supermarket. A few years later we came back to Egypt. Supermarkets had not caught on and for a few years my daughters were reminded of my health drive, but this time there were no temptations lurking around the corner. I felt entirely justified chopping away and feeding the children fresh vegetable soup. But my older daughter harboured an everlasting longing for the trappings of supermarkets. When she married her American husband, she made sure that he had no health hang-ups. Pre-packaged hamburgers were his normal fare, preferably washed down with a bottle of something fizzy and artificially coloured. There was a man after her heart!

When her first baby was born she called to tell me that no matter what, she would bring up her child to be a "normal kid". The baby, I am sad to report, was given soft drinks in her bottle when she was six months old. She practically grew up in a supermarket cart. Strangely enough, at the age of ten, my granddaughter still shows no signs of having been harmed in any way by these practices.

Fayza Hassan

# Playing with history

After a tour in Europe and the US in 1992, Mrs Mubarak embarked on a new project that will soon enchant a great number of children, writes Gihan Shahine

Queues of children from eight to 15 years old jostle each other and shuffle their feet impatiently, too excited to be quiet. They are about to embark on a journey in time, to ancient Egypt, and in space, down the Nile Valley, across the desert, and down to the bottom of the Red Sea — all in a pre-opening 45-minute tour of the Arab world's first ever high-tech children's museum.

Children are usually passive viewers of cultural artefacts in museums, constantly told never to touch anything, they soon become bored and attention spans are reduced to milliseconds. This is the first time that children are encouraged to participate actively in a cultural experience, welcome to touch, look and play as much as they please.

The museum is Mrs Mubarak's brainchild, conceived after a 1992 tour of Europe and the US. Her aim was to create an attractive, stimulating environment for children, "one in which they will be free, active and confident," in the first lady's words. "We also hope to encourage their participation, encourage them to observe, explore,

touch and relate, to discover new fields of interest, to pose new questions and try to answer them. Above all, we want our children to feel that they are the most important elements in this new museum." In response to Mrs Mubarak's recommendations, the Society for the Development of the Heliopolis Community, which she herself heads, signed an agreement with the Natural History Museum arranging for the supply of the latest technology, equipment, experts and designers in order to duplicate the London Natural History Museum here in Egypt. The museum was erected in Hadayeq Al-Ghaba, a park in Heliopolis, where the serene environment prepares children for their exciting journey into another world. The society bore all the expenses, which ran to six million pounds.

The new museum is also expected to fill, at least in part, a gap in the education system which emphasises rote learning of vast quantities of material and resorts but little to imagination, creativity, curiosity and understanding.

The museum is probably the first of a series,

as Mrs Mubarak plans to establish another one for science," says Inas Lutfi, head of the museum. "This one took time and effort for both the British crew, who were hardly acquainted with Egyptian history and environment, and the Egyptian historians, artists and architects who were there to help out."

The efforts do not seem to have gone to waste. Once inside, eight flashing screens welcome you with the question: "Who are you?" A simple question, but not necessarily an easy one to answer. "You are a part of Egypt, and Egypt is a part of you" is the reply. The first section provides children with information on ancient Egypt, none of it stuffy academic. You ask a question and press a button to see the answer appear on a screen, or lift a telephone receiver to listen to a story. How many stones is the Khafra Pyramid made of? Make a guess, push the right button, and a small pyramid opens up to reveal the answer.

The second section shows the Nile Valley: you can listen to a Nubian girl talking about her everyday life, or peek into a booth to listen to a Muslim song. Then there is the Bedouin tent where children's eyes and minds can wander through the desert and mingle with the animals at the bottom of a sand dune.

The third section brought squeals of excitement from the children allowed a sneak preview of the museum. There, the count-down had begun for the launching of a make-believe submarine on its long journey to the depths of the Red Sea. Noses were glued to screens for 15 minutes as the children gazed at the different species inhabiting the wonderful watery world and listened to explanations of habitats and feeding habits.

"It is amazing how much information the children assimilate, although there is really a lot to absorb," commented Amany Afef, a tour guide at the museum. "Our main target, however, is to entertain children and develop their imaginative and creative skills. So after their tour, we take them to the activity centre, where they can spend an hour drawing and creating. We also give them questions about some of the things they learned in the museum, and the response is outstanding."

### Sufra Dayma

#### Green spinach (I) (Upper Egyptian way)

**Ingredients:**  
2 kilos of fresh green spinach  
1 onion (grated)  
1 tbsp. of crushed garlic  
2 tbsp. of washed rice  
1 pint of chicken or meat stock  
Salt, pepper  
Butter or oil

**Method:**  
Cut all the tips and stems of the spinach and set aside to use in another dish (which I'll tell you about next week). Wash the spinach leaves very well under running water. With the "Mulukheya" chopper, chop the spinach leaves, then place them in a strainer inside the water basin and pour over 1 litre of boiling water to get rid of the spinach residue. Leave to cool then press inside the strainer to ensure the spinach is completely drained, set aside. In a cooking pan, fry the onion and garlic gently until tender, (do not brown), stir in the spinach, cover and simmer. As soon as the liquid of the spinach is absorbed pour over the stock and season slightly as spinach retains its own salts. Allow to cook until it thickens, put in the rice, lower the heat and leave to simmer until a thicker consistency is acquired. Serve with rice and chicken.  
**Moushira Abdel-Malek**

### Restaurant review

## Infrequent visits

Nigel Ryan on irregular dining

Long ago I lived around the corner from Pub 28. It was, to all intents and purposes, my local. I never went. Pub 28 is one of those places that are always there. Everybody knows about it, yet very few people ever seem to go. Last week I did, my fourth visit in as many years.

Nothing ever changes. Pub 28 has always struck me as suffering an identity crisis. It is a cross between a Mediterranean taverna, an English pub of "ye olde" variety, and a western saloon. There are wagon wheels, David Roberts prints, wine racks suspended from the ceiling. On the menu you will find such contemporary anachronisms as chicken in a basket, along with standard restaurant fare — an auberge, cafe de Paris and that kind of thing. Invariably there is a special chalked up on a blackboard, and the special, whenever I have been, has been shish taouk. And Pub 28 is dark. Dark wood, white walls, and lighting as dim as it gets. It is also cool, which in summer is a blessing, in winter less so.

The customers remain as constant as the decor and the menu. It seems to attract, in equal measure, the Zamalek based, middle-aged expatriate and the *infatih* businessman. It feels faintly boozy and oddly self-satisfied.

I ordered gratinated onion soup followed by Filet Mignon with mustard sauce. The person I was dining with ordered Pub 28 meatballs followed by the ever present special shish taouk. Soup and meatballs arrived with a basket of warm bread. The soup supported a layer of melted cheese, the meatballs con-

cealed a bed of shredded lettuce. Of the two, the soup was far and away the better. As onion soup goes it was very creditable. In fact, it is one item on the menu that I would wholeheartedly recommend.

The mustard sauce that covered my filet was an ambitious concoction. It was surprisingly frothy, containing, I guess, a quantity of beaten egg white, though the flavour was marred by the use of a particularly vinegary mustard. Beneath the sauce lay two very tender slices of fillet that had been cooked rare, as ordered. The shish taouk was a simpler affair, with pieces of chicken interspersed with onion and green pepper. The only thing you can do with a shish taouk is cook it competently and this had been done. Both entrees were served with french fries and vegetables. The latter consisted of carrots and french beans which had begun life in a freezer and ended being overcooked.

All in all the food was competently prepared. The soup was excellent, the meat of good quality, the shish taouk as good as one could hope. Nor was it that expensive. With two soft drinks, followed by two coffees, the bill came to LE75. Good value, standard restaurant fare. The question remains, why does one go so seldom, to somewhere that is in effect dependable and not overpriced? 1996 is upon us — and sometime, almost certainly, I will pay my fifth visit in as many years.

**Pub 28, Shagarat Al-Dur, Zamalek (beneath the General Hotel). Tel: 341 0200**

### Al-Ahram Weekly Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

#### ACROSS

1. Combat as in boxing (4)
5. Precedes room, chair and grease (5)
10. Arrive (4)
14. Theatre seat (4)
16. Beneath (5)
17. Functions (4)
18. Liquor (5)
19. Chain; tie (4)
20. Lodging (9)
22. Egyptian water-lily (5)
23. Guided (3)
24. Blank (3)
25. Retain (5)
28. The Armeda (5)
31. Describing some wines (3)
34. Drift (4)
35. Hunger after (5)
36. Photograph; gunfire (4)
37. So be it (4)

CROSS WORDS:  
NAME NATIONAL HOPE  
ADITI THROES BUSE  
NEILSON METAL REED  
VIEIL P. KIRBI  
WEED DOKTOR KONDO  
THE PINE BENDDED  
TOBE EMBRY DONIE  
GILLURURIA USO  
INGRAMS SILENT SHIM  
ASPIRUS LAOS  
STATE YARD CHANDED  
GOLDEN ENERGIC TAKIN  
ANNINA EDITION NETIS

#### DOWN

38. Stormed (5)
39. Facility (4)
40. Wagon (4)
41. Coarse corundum used for polishing metal or stones (5)
42. Dutch South African (4)
43. An explosive, abb. (3)
44. Mimicry (5)
45. Girdles or belts (5)
46. Cavity (3)
47. El Bar (3)
48. Officiate; seat (5)
51. Emphatic (9)
57. Employ (4)
58. Via con Dios (5)
59. File; jumbled (4)
60. Revise (4)
61. Town in Massachusetts (5)
62. Number of muses (4)
63. Trust (4)
64. Two hip muscles. —magnum and parvus (5)
65. Satisfy (4)
66. Kind of numerals (5)
67. Ward off (5)
68. Conceal false charge against (5)
69. Type of beer (5)
70. Each single (5)
71. Bedlam (5)
72. Scoff for resin" (5)
73. Worms (5)
74. Weather directions (3)
75. Plum-like fruit, pl. (9)
76. Broadcast (3)
77. Vehicle (3)
78. Devotion (5)
79. Paper measures (5)
80. Dear, Fr. (4)
81. Disguise (4)
82. Extra seed covering in certain plants (4)
83. Woe is me! (4)
84. Perform alone (4)
85. Tree whose fatty nut yields a vegetable butter (4)
86. Last portions of small intestines (4)
87. Make wine (4)
88. Duelling sword (4)
89. Small viper (3)

Last week's solution

دعا

# Stamps tell it all

Jasmine Maklad flips through the archives of Egypt's commemorative stamps, marking royal pomp and political victory, from the days of the first postal service established by Khedive Ismail up until the 1952 Revolution

8 January 1914 issue. Stamps were issued in Arabic and English (right) affirming British dominance in the country. Later that year, 18 December 1914, with the outbreak of the Great War, Egypt was declared a British protectorate.

Evacuation of the Nile Delta by the British troops, 30 March 1947. In accordance with the Anglo-Egyptian treaty, signed in 1936, the British forces started a plan of withdrawal from Egypt 10 years later, in 1946. This plan excluded the Suez Canal zone. On 9 August 1946, King Farouk hoisted the flag over the Citadel, marking the official withdrawal of British troops from Cairo. The stamp (right) shows King Farouk hoisting the Egyptian flag over the Qasr Al-Nil barracks, now the site of the Nile Hilton hotel in Cairo, in May of the following year.

Post revolution stamps. After the 23 July revolution, King Farouk I was forced to abdicate and he and his family were exiled three days later. One of the first issues after the revolution (right), was designed to represent the ideals of freedom, hope and peace. This issue includes a woman symbolising Egypt, raising a sword against a background of the old Egyptian flag. Another depicts an olive branch and broken shackles against a backdrop of a rising sun.

Since early pharaonic times Egypt has used a variety of communication means. Water transport once linked inhabitants of the east and west banks of the river Nile; a pony express service, under the Mamlukes, allowed messages to be sent from Cairo to Damascus within days; and carrier pigeons flew messages from the frontiers of the Middle East to Cairo for centuries. Throughout history Egypt has been a communications hub, connecting the Mediterranean, the Middle East, Africa and Asia.

In 1862 "Posta Europea", which had been established in Alexandria in the 1830s, signed a 10-year contract for the exclusive right to transport mail in Egypt. Only three years later,

however, Khedive Ismail re-purchased the monopoly on the right to transport mail for the Egyptian government. In 1866 the Khedival Post was established and for the first time in Egypt's history the postal service was to serve general public mail, not just government mail.

Stamps were introduced in Egypt in the very same year — 26 years after the first-ever stamp, the Penny Black, was produced in Great Britain. Historian Maged Farag, also owner of Max Group advertising, recently produced a photo album tracing the story of communication in ancient Egypt and its development through the Persian occupation, the Greek Ptolemaic rule and the Arab and Mamluke rule.

"My books encompass a century and a half of Egypt's history. The enemy of the book today is TV so I have tried to present the material in a compromised way where documentary films and books come together," Farag said. "The main target of this album is not to describe the history of communication or the postal service but instead, through these stamps, to illustrate and document some of the events which took place in Egypt over the past century and a half," he added.

Farag quoted Tsar Nicholas II, the last Tsar of Russia as saying: "Only that country is strong, which cherishes and preserves its heritage."

Designed in the late 1950s by the noted artist, sculptor and cartoonist in *Al-Musawwar* magazine, Abbas El-Sheikh, this stamp is the first one issued in Egypt that did not reflect or promote Egypt's old colonial history under the British.

Until 1956, the British had been responsible for the designing and printing of Egyptian stamps and bank notes. But following the 1956 Suez War, the late President Gamal Abdel-Nasser, asserting that these printing initiatives should be a totally Egyptian undertaking, charged the Central Bank of Egypt with printing the currency and stamps.

If the stamp on display in the Mail Museum could be deemed symbolic of an end to a colonial era, then its commissioning, at least for its designer Abbas El-Sheikh, a graduate of the Faculty of Fine Arts in 1937, represented the start of a new career through which he left an indelible mark on modern Egyptian history.

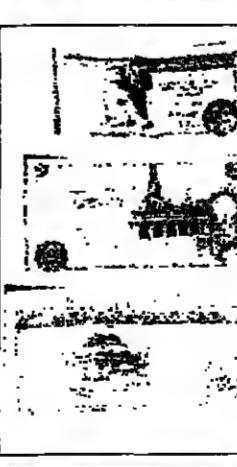
While El-Sheikh was highly recommended to Abdel-Nasser due to his fame as an artist, the political significance of the decision to make currency printing a wholly-Egyptian endeavour, made careful selection of the designer of paramount importance.

"Artistically and politically, it was a patriotic and progressive move," El-Sheikh said, discussing the significance of printing the notes in Egypt.

El-Sheikh's skill, however, was more than enough to carry him through a designing test, and he was quickly given the responsibility for designing and painting Egyptian bank notes along with the snappy title, Manager of the Printing De-

partment.

Artist-cartoonist Abbas El-Sheikh made money in a way many would envy: he designed and printed it. Rana Allam talks to the man who pioneered Egypt's modern currency printing industry



For inspiration, El-Sheikh, who is now a professor at Helwan University, capitalised on Egypt's Islamic and Pharaonic history, a tradition proudly reflected in the interior decorating for his house. This bi-cultural tradition was also evident in the design for the new one-pound note. "Islamic designs prevailed on one side of the note while the other featured a scene from Pharaonic Egypt," he said. Egyptians were not the only ones impressed with his new design. In an international competition for bank note designs held in Munich, West Germany, his new note won the first prize among 70 other entries.

Nationalism and patriotism was also the predominant theme in the designs for the new stamps.

His first stamps focused on Egypt's accomplishments after the 23 July Revolution, which brought Abdel-Nasser to power, the Suez War in 1956 and the merger between Egypt and Syria to form the United Arab Republic in 1958.

"Designing and painting these stamps and notes was a very difficult job," El-Sheikh said. "It required precision, finesse and a steady hand, but it was extremely interesting."

The most difficult aspect about designing these stamps and notes, he stated, was the fact that they were not drawn to scale. The drawings were done under a microscope on a 1:1 scale, which meant that each line had to be as fine and precise as the last. There was no margin for error.

While each bill takes a different amount of work and time, on average, each face takes about three months to complete. "For example, the pound note needs more time to finish than the 25-piastre bill. Even the wood pulp is different for each note," he explained.

Political considerations were not the only motivating factors for the new currency. "Artists took into account that handicapped people also used the money, and as a result, made each bill a different

size so that the blind could easily differentiate between one denomination and the other," said El-Sheikh.

But interesting as the job was, it did take its toll on El-Sheikh and the other trainees and artists to follow him. "Trainees in this line of work generally begin their training at the age of five or six and end their career at the age of 25," he said. "Since the designs have to be accurate down to the millimetre, sharp eyes are necessary. Unfortunately, it really strains the eyes."

It is also an exclusive business, with only five or six artists in the world having done this kind of work. "Compared to these artists and designers, the artisans and craftsmen in Khan El-Khalili are amateurs," he said. "This kind of precision and skill is just not found anymore."

Aside from the physical toll exacted by the job, El-Sheikh was also obliged to make several personal sacrifices. "I had to spend weeks locked in a

small room, with minimal contact with people," he recalled. "But being alone was not what bothered me, it was the fact that I was always followed by security personnel."

El-Sheikh was one of a select few with intimate knowledge of the currency designs, colours used for the notes and the consistency of the wood pulp used in the notes. "In my mind I held the secrets for how to manufacture the money — secrets that could bring down the economy if misused," he said. "Each bill required a specific colour and pulp. Only I knew the exact mixtures." But while he never had a run-in with unsavoury characters and was never searched when travelling, he complained that "my outings were limited, and I was not allowed (by the government) to go to some places."

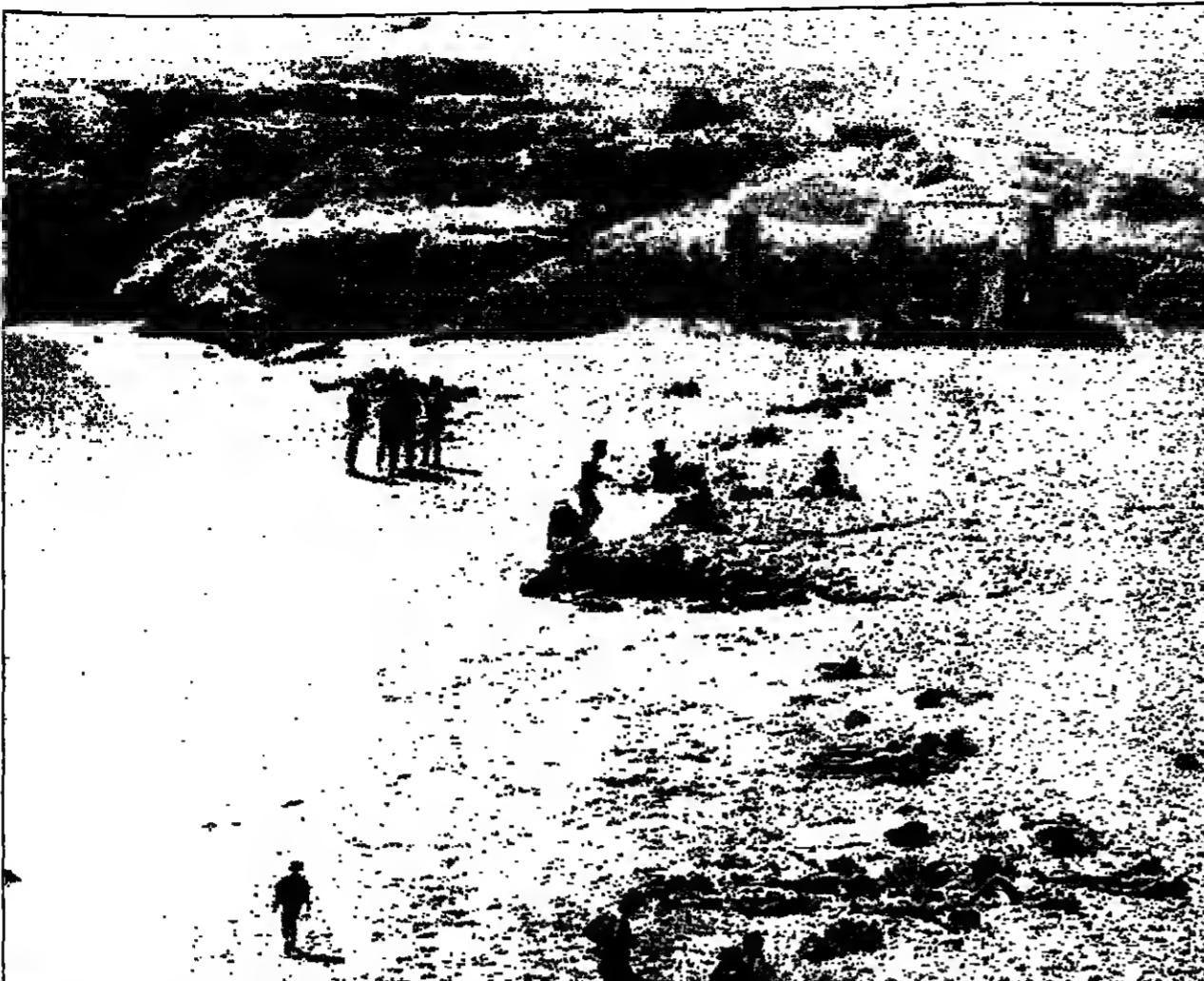
To guard against counterfeiting, each bill was marked with a "water mark" in a white space left on the bill. In addition, an insoluble metal line is added. While the paint could be washed off, the line would remain. "In contrast to modern notes which are all printed on the same kind of paper, use the same colours and have fixed designs, these bills could not be forged easily," El-Sheikh stressed.

The advent of the computer age, however, has rendered El-Sheikh's kind of skill obsolete. The designs for stamps and bank notes are done on computer, and the printing process, which was once considered an art, is now an industry.

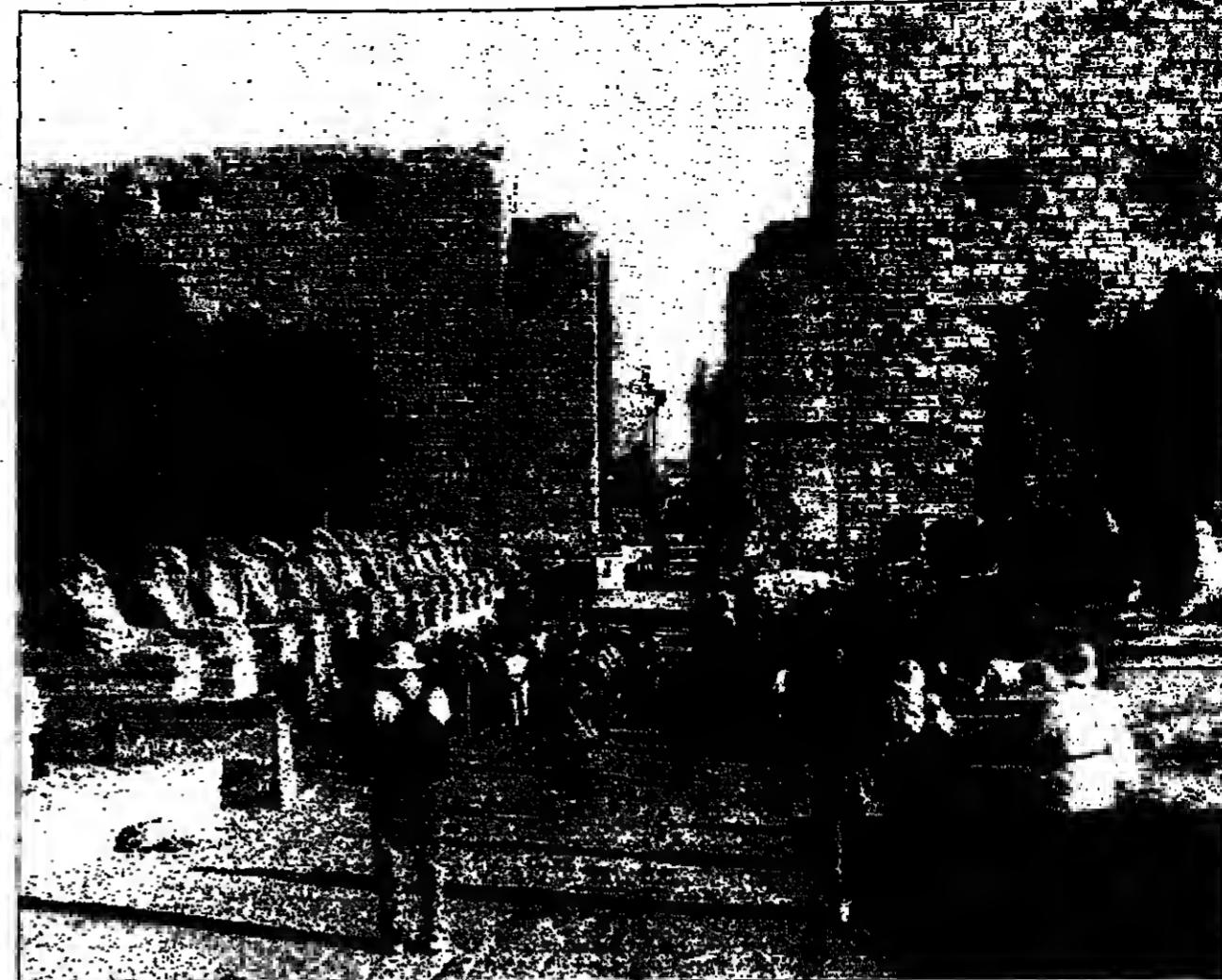
"The quality of the bank notes and stamps printed is deteriorating," said El-Sheikh, "because the artist who used to supervise the design has now been replaced by an administrator."

"I may not know a great deal about computers," he added, "but I know that art is a form of creating, not copying. In this light, computers fall painfully short of the mark."

Edited by Fouad El-Gawhary



Basking in winter sunshine in Sinai and touring Upper Egyptian monuments in mild weather are two of Egypt's many attractions



photos: Khaled El-Fiqi

## Selling tourism

Every year millions of Europeans make their way to the islands of Mediterranean islands of Majorca, Ibiza, Corfu and Cyprus, not to mention the coastal resorts of Morocco, Tunisia, Greece and southern Turkey. Over 52 million tourists went to Spain in 1995.

The coastal resorts of Morocco and Tunis also did a thriving business. Tunisia fulfilled its annual expectation of four million visitors. Turkey welcomes 8.2 million annually and has set a goal of 17 million by the year 2000. And even the tiny island of Cyprus, with limited archaeological and architectural attractions, receives over two million annually.

Yet Egypt, which arguably has better and bigger beaches, more tourist attractions in terms of history and culture, a wider variety of destinations, and a more congenial year-round climate, is lagging far behind. Even in its tourist heyday, 1992, it could boast of a goal of no more than four million tourists. There is no doubt that Egypt's tourist trade has picked up since the recent slump, but optimists should remember that statistics are not always a reflection of the true picture. The increase in the number of tourists this year was partly the result of extremely tempting all-in deals offered by travel agencies abroad. Tourists flew directly from Europe to destinations on the Red Sea or in Luxor and, according to reports by guides and agents, seldom took in other sites.

There is no doubt that Egypt has a lot of competition — many countries are trying to capture a share of the global tourist market; perhaps some have a better product, in terms of providing what the market is seeking.

When dealing with the tourist industry, we have to ask: What do tourists want in Egypt giving them? Let us look at patterns of national behaviour in an effort to find an answer.

Egypt's traditional tourist product is historical monuments and this, according to tour guides, is what French travellers want. Yet their numbers are relatively small: 85,747 between January and September 1995, compared with 215,785 from Germany and 183,444 from Italy.

Japanese and Koreans are also interested in

What do tourists really want? The travel page staff undertake a nation by nation investigation, and, as Jill Kamill reports, find different answers

Egypt's heritage. They also have a reputation as big spenders among traders who compete for their custom. They also tend to travel in groups, and want to take in as much, as quickly, as possible.

Germany is Egypt's largest market, according to statistics for the period of January to September 1995. Tamer Seif, a tour operator responsible for German groups, cites Egypt's main attractions for Germans as "sunny beaches and facilities for deep sea diving and water sports".

He said that a German tourist spends an average of 21 days in Egypt, "five of them at the seaside, the others divided between archaeological and safari trips. They often fly from the Red Sea to Cairo for a couple of days to see the pyramids and the Egyptian Museum." As far as Egypt is concerned, this is an ideal arrangement: holidays with both sun and culture.

Italians also love sun and sea. According to Marco del Panta, the press attaché at the Italian Embassy in Cairo, "Sharm Al-Sheikh is a relatively new destination for Italians. Most of them go to the Hilton Hotel in Hurghada, which has contacts with a major tour operator in Italy."

Abdallah Ibrahim, a tour operator who deals with Italian groups, explained that many Italians switched their allegiance to Egypt from Turkey, following bombings there in 1995. While, like the Germans, they tend to make the Red Sea their main destination, they are less likely to take a domestic flight to Cairo or Luxor. "They are too expensive," said Ibrahim, who added that the average Italian tourist finds relaxing on a beach far more enjoyable than visiting ancient monuments; any sightseeing is likely to be undertaken from the comfort of a Nile cruiser.

Spaniards want something else again. "The average Spanish tourist spends from 8 to 15 days in Egypt," said Ali Ghoneim, a travel agency owner and manager. He added that 90 per cent of most Spanish tourists' time was spent on the classical tour of Cairo, Luxor and Aswan. "They love sea and sun, but they get that in their own country," said Ghoneim. "Good beaches are only a fringe benefit for them. The Spanish are not beach tourists outside their own country".

Meanwhile, the British, in the words of Michael Stock, who served with the British Embassy in Cairo for three years and is a frequent traveller to Egypt, tend to be "geared to a Mediterranean holiday". And, Stock suggests, "Egypt does not satisfy their requirements. They are looking for the best-value holiday in terms of weather, sea and beach, healthy food and clean, comfortable accommodation".

They mostly travel with their families and want to have a good time, which in their minds includes a choice of bars, cafés, restaurants, places where people can listen to music and find junk food outlets". In his view the only place in Egypt which can satisfy these demands is Sharm Al-Sheikh, which he said, has priced itself out of the market for the average British family. "Most of the hotels are too expensive, and the others are overbooked." He also stressed the nature of the British tourist trade, with its emphasis on package holidays. Most people, he said, go to their own travel agent in Britain, study brochures, and "book a holiday" many months in advance.

With British visitors to Spain reaching nine million in 1994, with an additional 3,300,000 advance bookings for the period up to the following July, can Egypt ever hope to provide a market like this with what it wants at prices it can afford?

To increase tourist flow in Turkey — which regularly receives over eight million tourists annually — the strategy has been to "use the price as a tool", according to Nazif Ekmekci, undersecretary at the Turkish Ministry of Tourism. He believes that while

his country has reaped the benefits of being easier to access from Europe, the fact that it offers competitive prices has been more important in boosting numbers. Efforts are also being made to diversify the Turkish industry, by improving the country's south-east coast and introducing winter sports, health tourism and "new areas for Turkish traditional tourism".

However, rather than direct competition with neighbouring countries, Ekmekci is keen to promote regional cooperation. "What we need, as eastern Mediterranean countries," he said, "is promotional cooperation, because a new market is growing fast and the countries in the eastern Mediterranean, including Turkey, Israel, Egypt, Syria and Lebanon, need to compete with the markets of the western Mediterranean, notably Italy, Spain and Portugal." This, he added, "was the concept behind the establishment of the Middle Eastern Mediterranean Tourist Association (MEMTA) — to market the eastern Mediterranean countries as a package."

But, according to the Israeli press attaché in Cairo, Yacob Seiy, MEMTA agreements have been signed, but so far nothing has been done to sell the region as a package, although he said that Egypt and Israel were in "close cooperation".

Tourism is a multi-million dollar industry that needs to provide diverse facilities catering for various tastes, from the 'family holiday' to the cultural tour, encouraging different kinds of visitors to come to Egypt and stay longer — and to return year after year. Considerable steps towards diversification have already been taken in Egypt, with the promotion of conference, recreational and sports tourism, which in the latter case has included the organisation of successful surfing, fishing, diving and horse and camel festivals. Egypt is already "sold" fix as historical sites are concerned. No one can do better. Let us now continue to recognise the considerable competition from other countries, research the markets and develop our facilities in such a way as to turn ourselves into real rivals.

Additional reporting by Nevine El-Aref and Omayma Abdel-Latif

## Carving out a fair share

In an exclusive interview, Minister of Tourism Mamoud El-Beltagui told Rehab Saad about his vision of the future for Egypt's tourism.



Egypt does not get its fair share of international tourism. Despite its incomparable monuments, mild climate and quality beaches, it is still definitely a minority destination. These are facts that Minister of Tourism Mamoud El-Beltagui is willing to acknowledge as he works towards the tourist industry's development and diversification.

"We cannot compare ourselves to the big Mediterranean tourist destinations because of two major obstacles," said El-Beltagui. One is what he terms the "lack of general awareness in Egypt of the importance of the tourist industry", in other words, Egyptians are not always treating tourists right. He believes that this factor often influences the choice of would-be visitors and is something which needs to be quickly remedied.

"We are already showing a series of "awareness" adverts on TV to show the general public the right way to deal with tourists," said El-Beltagui, "and the school-curricula has been extended to include studies on tourism-related subjects". While well aware that this is a long-term project, El-Beltagui feels confident it will pay off in the future and lead to growth in the industry.

Another reason El-Beltagui cites for Egypt's small share of the tourist market is lack of promotion in the international media. While recent campaigns have proved successful, Egypt was late to jump on the bandwagon. "Spain, on the other hand has been promoting itself for decades," he said.

Sheer proximity is another reason tourists choose Spain and Greece over Egypt, according to El-Beltagui. Holidaymakers from northern Europe are simply able to drive to their destinations. Travellers coming to Egypt, on the other hand, "have to book a flight, and go through all the palaver of travelling to a distant destination".

He is also concerned that Egypt is losing out in the popularity stakes because visitors, particularly in the Red Sea area, are being forced to stay within their tourist villages because of a lack of public facilities outside. He has, he said, been aware of this problem for a long time. "I have met investors in Red Sea projects and pointed out the importance of linking tourist villages by a promenade along the beach." Plans were already being made for this, he said, and the Ministry of Tourism was prepared to foot the bill. In addition, the fences surrounding villages will be removed, and facilities built between the villages, enabling the tourists to wander around freely, enjoying public facilities.

He was also conscious of the need to develop "downtown" projects. "European visitors are energetic," he stressed. "They like to swim, dive, go on safari trips, have lunch in a restaurant, and so on. So instead of building new villages, I am encouraging investors to provide more opportunities within towns."

"In Hurghada, for example, there is a traditional fishing village which I feel could be modernised to become a tourist attraction, with fish restaurants, cafeterias and coffee shops."

This year Egypt is considering introducing facilities geared to foreign tourists on the Mediterranean coast. "We've just begun to think about it this year," said El-Beltagui. So far, some Russians have come to the area, and plans are in action to attract Italians and Germans, especially to Aswan.

Turning to the question of regional tourism and cooperation between the countries of the eastern Mediterranean, El-Beltagui stressed that their relationship should be "complementary rather than competitive", but was keen to point out that in his mind Egypt was number one in the region.

"Every country has its own attractions. No other country has a Pharaonic heritage; that is exclusive to Egypt. Even our recreational tourism is diverse, since the coral reefs offshore in Sinai offer a different underwater experience from deep-sea diving off Hurghada. Egypt's position as a destination for regional tourism is an additional attraction, but it will never be an alternative."

Nevertheless, El-Beltagui sees the advantages of package tourism combining more than one destination. "Greece asked us to promote our respective countries in a single package: tourists could visit Greece in the winter and then come to the Red Sea. Turkey also wanted to develop regional cooperation, and I can see advantages in this too," he said.

Egypt's target for the year 2000 is 6.3 million tourists, according to El-Beltagui. But could Egypt absorb this number? He affirmed that it could. "We have allocated 100 projects since 1984 over an area of 39 million square metres and at a cost of LE8.7 million. These new projects will increase our capacity by 53,000 rooms and 106,000 beds. The present total capacity throughout the country is 126,000 beds."

### Complementary lines

#### The art of life

Jarostaw Dobrowolski sketches the sanctuary of the Sultan Barquq complex, which Helen Miles finds is still a cool place to retreat from the mid-day sun

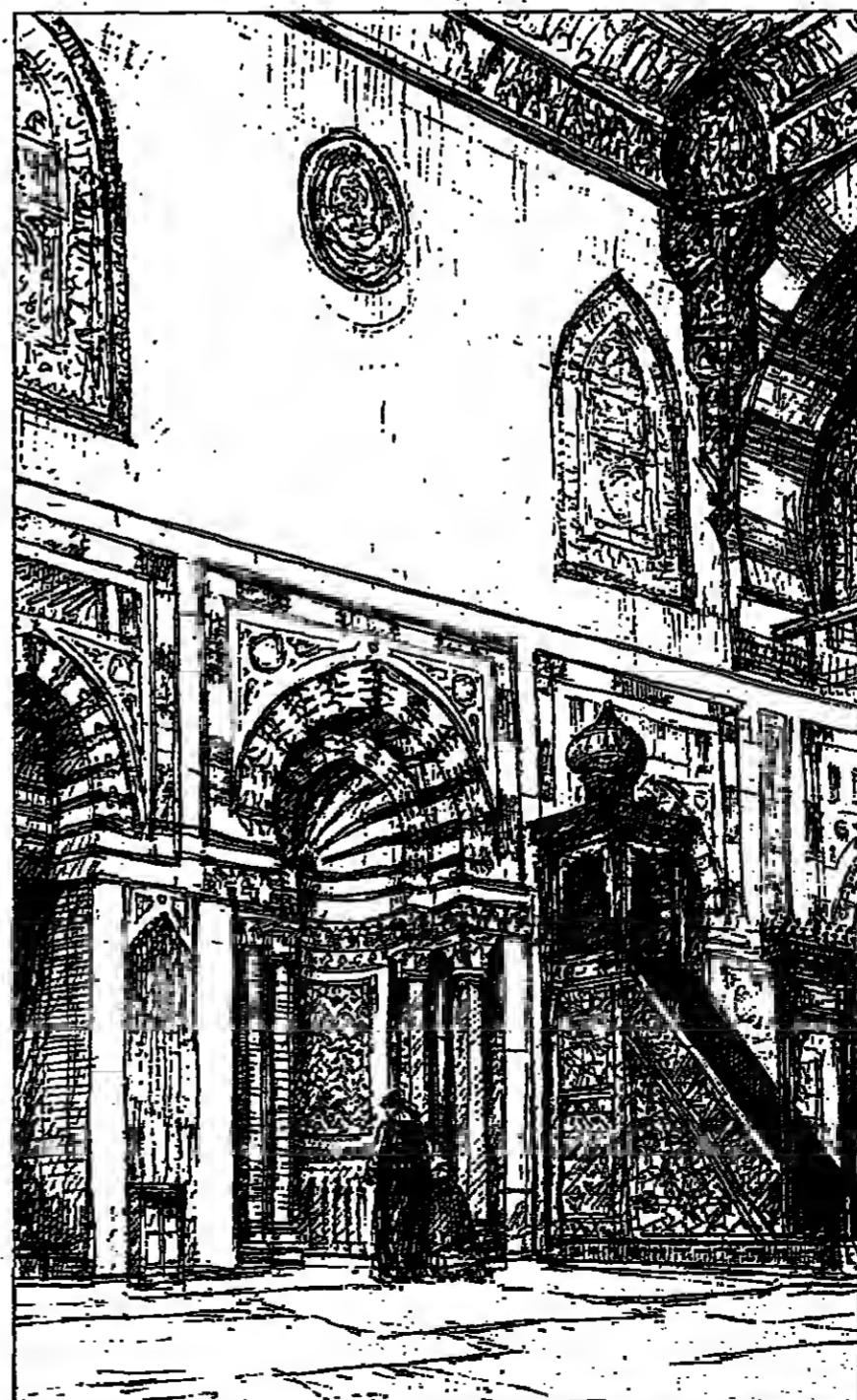
Each Islamic monument has its own way of trapping the mid-day light. The towering walls of the Sultan Barquq complex, sketched here, slice through it like wire through cheese, cleanly and coolly, depositing sharp wedges of sun which pierce the open spaces without reaching the shaded recesses.

Contrasts between light and shade, between straight lines and soft curves, are a constant refrain in this monument, which might be intimidating were it not for the way the geometry enhances the subtleties of the decorative details, as a table edge does in a still life. The vertical of the minaret is offset by the swell of the dome; the uncompromising scale of the courtyard is broken by the wooden frippery on the eaves of the central fountain.

Designed as a school and *khanaqah* (Sufi residence), the complex was begun in the 14th century by Barquq, a Circassian, who seized power during the Mamluke era in 1382. It still possesses an atmosphere of scholarly retreat although its benefactor was too busy with a series of bloodthirsty coups and counter-coups to have time for contemplative pursuits.

It is entered by a vaulted passage which ends in an open court paved with black and white marble and porphyry shapes like an enormous children's board game. Four doors at each corner of the court lead upstairs to the rooms once used by the theological students. The sanctuary at one end, drawn here, features four porphyry columns crafted in Pharaonic times from rock quarried in the Red Sea mountains, a stone pulpit donated by Qait Bey, and a high painted wooden ceiling which catches the light like mica glimpsed beneath running water. There is also a domed chamber off the courtyard containing the tomb of Barquq's daughter, Fatima, richly decorated and illuminated by restored stained glass windows. Although still functioning as a mosque, the building is little used. A black and white cat, its markings reminiscent of the interlocking patterns over the *mihrab*, has the place virtually to itself.

The building is on the left of Al-Muizz Liddin Al-Azhar Street in Islamic Cairo as you come from Al-Azhar Street, just past the Qalawun complex.



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# Ahli volleys to the top

The 7th African Volleyball Winner's Cup drew to a close last week in the Ahli Club with the host team walking away with a clean sweep. Abeer Anwar was there

Hard work and determination, the stuff of champions, paid off for Ahli's women's and men's volleyball teams, allowing them to break the serves and block the advance of other teams, and win the 7th African Volleyball Winner's Cup last week.

In a series of fast-paced and well played matches, the women's team smashed their way through Egypt's Zamalek team, Algeria's Bejaia and Mouloudia teams and Tunisia's Helal, winning all their matches 3-0. Helal took second place, Bejaia, third and Zamalek fourth.

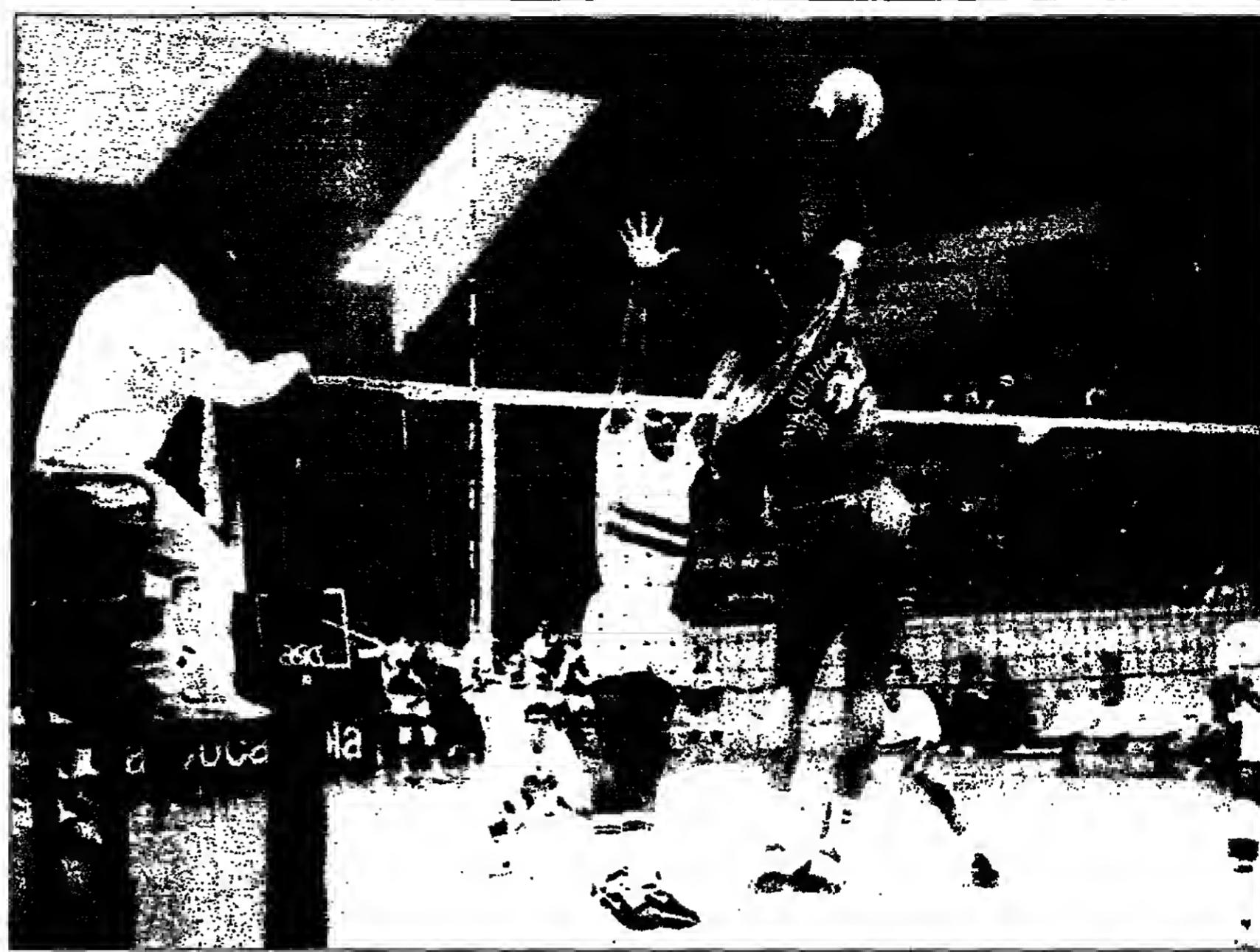
In the men's competition, six teams, including Ahli and Zamalek competed for the cup. For the Ahli men, the pressure was on to snatch the trophy away from three-time title holder, Algeria's Olympic Media. In a run-up to the show down between the two arch rivals, Ahli took on Algeria's Mouloudia and defeated them 3-0. Olympic Media met with a similar fate, succumbing to Ahli's powerful serves and volleys, to lose the match 3-1. The winning streak, however, was temporarily interrupted when Ahli lost to Tunisia's Al-Negm Al-Sahef 1-3. And with Zamalek so far undefeated in the tournament, the loss cost Ahli tremendous face.

To negate the damage, Ahli coach Ibrahim Fakhr-Eddin assumed the guise of a cyber-kid, and plotted Zamalek's performance the next day against Olympic Media. Using a series of complicated al-

gorithms and permutations, or maybe some common sense, Fakhr-Eddin devised a game plan against Zamalek which paid off. In the match against Ahli, Zamalek's players were too cocky for their own good, and received a thorough 3-0 loss to Ahli. Even the cheers of the fans and the drum beats that reverberated throughout Ahli's indoor court were ineffective in slowing down the Ahli onslaught. Ahli was also aided by some foolish player substitutions made by Zamalek coach Gaber Abdellatif at some inopportune moments.

Amid much fanfare and hoopla, Ahli's Tahani Tossoun was named best female player. Helal's Bia ben Hassouna was named best playmaker. Ahli's Mona Abd-el-Karim was best blocker. The Ahli men also earned some kudos. Maged Mustafa was named best player and Mohamed Mekhlifi won the best player award.

In related news, following the National Olympic Committee's decision to stand firm and ban the national volleyball team from competing in the Atlanta Olympics, the entire board of directors resigned their posts. Supreme Council for Youth and Sport Head, Abdel-Moneim Emara, appointed another board headed by Amr Elwan, a former international volleyball player and an Ahli Club volleyball official. The new board will temporarily run the show until a new board is elected after the Olympics in July.



Zamalek's guaranteed victory turned into an unexpected defeat against Ahli

photo: Salah Ibrahim

## Not so gently, down the Nile

As history comes full circle, says Naswa Abdel-Tawab, the 24th Annual Nile International Rowing Race draws to a close in Cairo and Luxor

Sailing down the Nile in Upper Egypt, with the temples and monuments of Luxor, centuries-old sentries bordering the banks of the river, one is consumed by a sense of timelessness, as if drawn into a world where history and the present meet as one. There is a continuity that prevails, unspoiled by the hotels and the markings of urbanisation, and often reflected in folkloric festivals or in the re-enactments of Pharaonic ceremonies and competitions.

The Annual Nile Rowing Festival, which drew to a close last week, is just one such event. Some 3,500 years ago, in 1500 BC, the Pharaoh Akhenaten held the predecessor to this race, the first Festival of Oars. As with many ancient rites, rituals and ceremonies, the main object of the 2,000m race, which begins on the Nile, by Luxor Temple and ends at the Temple of Karnak, is not merely to win but to win in order to receive the pharaoh's blessing. Once the racers had reached the Temple of Karnak, and the winners determined, they would take their boats out of the water, and run through the Ram's Pas-

sage to the Sacred Lake in Karnak. There, the winners would celebrate their victory and receive Akhenaten's blessings.

Although the race gradually died along with Pharaonic civilisation, it was revived in 1971 with some minor modifications — the blessings of the pharaohs were replaced by sponsorship from the Egyptian Rowing Federation (ERF). At first, the race was staged using only Egyptian teams, but the ERF quickly added another measure of prestige, and expanded the competition by inviting crew teams from Oxford and Cambridge Universities. This move helped attract a number of other famous teams.

In 1975, the ERF moved that year's race to Ismailia to commemorate the re-opening of the Suez Canal, and in 1982, it took on an international dimension. It was expanded from one race to eight, and in 1988, was included on the list of events in the International Rowing Calendar.

With Luxor and Cairo as the sites for the race, this year 86 invitations were sent to the International Rowing Federa-

tion, and 30 to foreign clubs. Eight teams, representing Germany, the US, Slovakia and Hungary, plus three from Egyptian clubs, participated in a total of 17 juniors and senior races.

While the Egyptian rowers captured an overall first place, winning eight medals, the competition from the German and American rowers in the scull and skiff competitions was stiff. Germany's Landes Ruderverband topped the rankings in the double scull and skiff events. Germany's performance was aided by the fact that three out of four of the German rowers in this event are on the national team.

The US was also no easy hurdle to overcome in the skiff competition. Egypt's Ali Ibrahim had his work cut out for him as he sought to defeat an American rower, but in the end, managed to pull ahead. As part of his preparations for the Atlanta Olympics, Ibrahim will be in a closed camp for three months. He will then move on to Italy, Belgium, France and Switzerland for training and competitions before finally departing for Atlanta.

Impressive as it was, Egypt's fancy footwork and strong teamwork was not enough to hold off the Ghanaian onslaught to last Friday's friendly soccer match.

Ghana came from behind in the second half to steal the show 2-1.

At first, the strategy implemented by the Egyptian team's Dutch coach Ruud Krol, strengthening the defense, seemed to work. But attempts by Egypt to break the Egyptian defense, was forced to resort to long-range shots. Their first break, however, came when Krol substituted right-winger Ahmed Hassan and team captain, El-Kass. While it probably wasn't the best time to make sure that everyone got to play, for Ghana, these substitutions were a godsend. In a 30th minute equalizer, Sam Johnson nudged an in-flight volley by Ali Ibrahim. From there on, the tempo of the match was punctuated by sporadic attacks by both sides. But a wild shot by Ghana's Mallam Yahya in the 90th minute of the second half took the Egyptian defense by surprise and gave Ghana a 2-1 win, and its second victory over Egypt in the span of four years.

With both teams tightening up their formation, Egypt again took the initiative. Best intentions, however, often fall short of the mark, and so was the case for the Egyptian team. While El-Kass nearly drilled a rebounding ball home again after a weak shot by Ali Maher, his shot was wide, as were a half dozen other shots.

In the early minutes of the second half, with Egypt still playing the offensive, Ghana, unable to penetrate through the Egyptian defense, was forced to resort to long-range shots. Their first break, however, came when Krol substituted right-winger Ahmed Hassan and team captain, El-Kass. While it probably wasn't the best time to make sure that everyone got to play, for Ghana, these substitutions were a godsend. In a 30th minute equalizer, Sam Johnson nudged an in-flight volley by Ali Ibrahim. From there on, the tempo of the match was punctuated by sporadic attacks by both sides. But a wild shot by Ghana's Mallam Yahya in the 90th minute of the second half took the Egyptian defense by surprise and gave Ghana a 2-1 win, and its second victory over Egypt in the span of four years.

For Krol and the Egyptian Football Federation, the outcome of the game was no real surprise. Realising that the team still had a long way to go in terms of honing up its weak defense, Krol viewed this match as a learning experience and an experiment.

"I wasn't interested in the outcome of the match against Ghana as much as I was in the outcome of the African Nations Cup," said Krol. "This match was just a training session in preparation for playing the best teams in Africa. It was a testing ground for the team's physical and technical strength."

Although the match was forecast as an easy victory for Egypt, clearly, the Ghanaian team proved to be more powerful than expected. In addition to skillful maneuvering by Ghana, the odds were also stacked against Egypt due to several injuries suffered by team members in the last few weeks. With one week to go before the match, Krol was scrambling to find replacements for Sami Shishini, Hani Ramzy, Ayman Mansour, Hazem Imam and Dawoud Nasser, all of whom warmed the bench during the game. The replacements were drawn off the rosters of local league teams.

## Sports minister cries foul

A cry of foul play spilled forth from Abdel-Moneim Emara, pitting the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports against the Arab Football Federation. Amira Ibrahim reports

The spirit of good sportsmanship flew out the window following the conclusion of the Arab Football Super Cup, which was hosted by Saudi Arabia from 18-23 December, when Supreme Council for Youth and Sports' (SCYS) head, Abdel-Moneim Emara expressed his opposition to Egyptian teams hence forth participating in Arab championships.

The source of the confrontation between Emara and Saudi Prince, Faisal bin Fahd, head of the Arab Football Federation (AFF) stems from statements made by Emara that the AFF had set a trap

for Egypt's champion football team, Ahli, Emara, along with some other critics and sports officials criticised the new system created by the AFF, whereby two additional Saudi teams were allowed to participate in the Super Cup championship, bringing the number of Saudi teams participating in the championship to three. The competition is usually held between two teams only.

Emara and other critics also contend that Ahli fell victim to biased refereeing and subsequently lost the match against Saudi Ittihad 1-0 and Al-Shabab, 2-1. But even though Ahli defeated Saudi

champion, Al-Hilal, Al-Shabab won the cup due to Ahli's only victory. Until Al-Hilal lost to Ahli, they were favoured to win the cup. In short, critics maintain, Ahli was set up.

Within hours Prince Fahd, in a press conference, voiced his outrage at Emara's allegations, and demanded clarification as to whether the statements were Emara's personal views on Arab competitions or indicative of Egypt's national view on the issue. "If he really meant what he said, which I doubt," said Fahd, "then Egypt's sports programme will be the real loser."

Nevertheless, added Fahd, "Arab sports will continue, with or without Egypt's participation."

There were those in Egypt, however, who felt that Emara's statements may have been more an expression of his frustration.

However, members of the allegedly defrauded team, Ahli, did not take the loss as hard as Emara. "It's not the end of the world to lose," said Ibrahim El-Mo'alim, an Alhi board member and head of the Ahli delegation to the Super Cup. "We may have lost the cup, but we played well enough to earn the respect of Arab sports of

ficials and fans."

As a representative of one of the teams which will lose out if Emara has his way, El-Mo'alim stressed, "You can't recapture the lead if you run away. That would be tantamount to defeatism." While there is truth in his message, El-Mo'alim is also working to promote his own hidden agenda. The Ahli and Zamalek clubs are currently competing for the right to organise the Arab League Champions Cup in December, 1996. Withdrawal from Arab competitions would essentially shoot down Ahli's bid to organise the tournament.

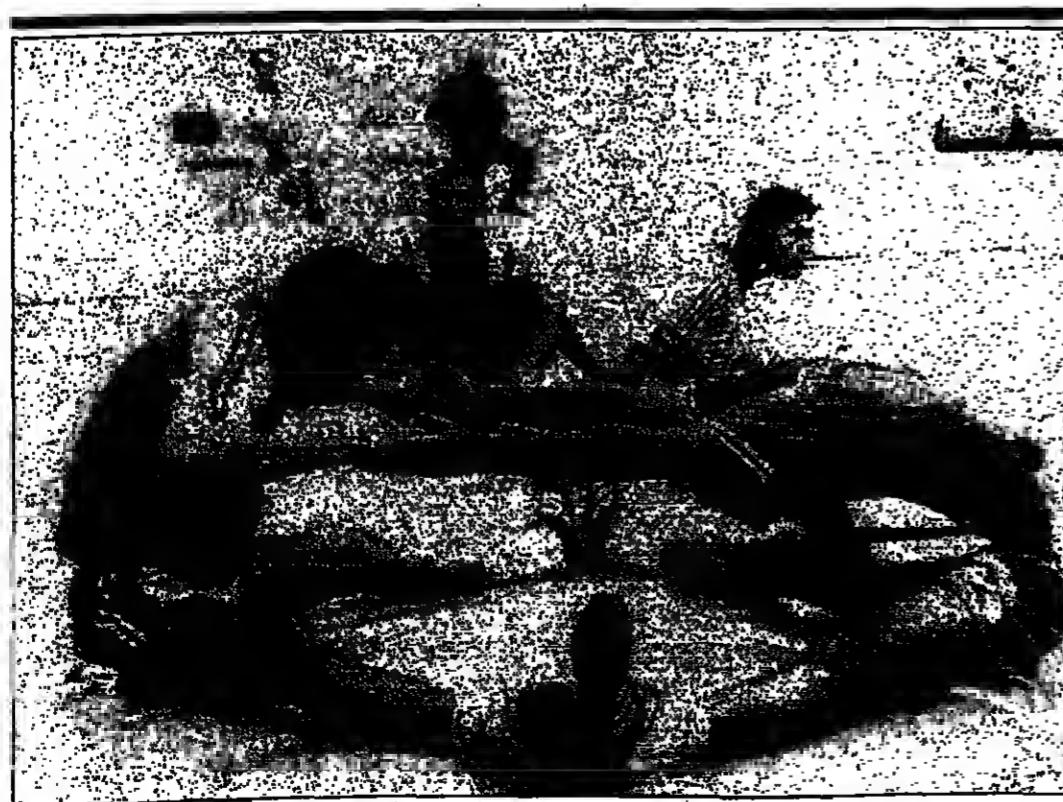


photo: Amr Ghaly

**Handballers go north:** A long voyage is in the stars for the Egyptian national handball team which will be competing in the four nations Spanish International Handball Tournament, set to begin in Spain on 7 January. Over the course of three days, the team will play three matches.

The first, on Friday, will be against Norway. The second match, scheduled for Saturday, will be against Denmark, and the third match, on Sunday, will be against host country, Spain. The winner of the tourna-

ment will be determined based on points. From sunny Spain the team will then leave for snowy Sweden on 9 January, for the 1996 World Cup. The competition will involve the eight best handball teams in the world, based on the results of the last world championship held in Iceland in May.

Along with Egypt, France, Croatia, Sweden, Germany, the Czech Republic, Russia and Switzerland will be vying for the gold. The competition will be divided into two groups, with Egypt playing in group two against Croatia, Germany and Russia.

Edited by Inas Mazhar

En vente tous les mercredis

**H d'Or 1995**  
*Khachaba joueur de l'année*  
**Assemblée du peuple**  
*L'immunité parlementaire en examen*  
**Le président de l'Organisme des marchés financiers**  
*1996 sera l'année des obligations*

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Rédacteur en Chef  
 Exécutif  
 Mohamed Salmawy

Président  
 et Rédacteur en Chef  
 Ibrahim Nafie



From left, clockwise: Farid El-Atrash, photographed at home; Van Leo the sometime surrealist, dressing down to dress up; Taha Hussein, humanitarian liberal as stage prop; Miss Bee Groenwald, South African entertainer and wartime habitué of Van Leo's perfect world of glamour and Shadi Abdel-Salam, director of *Al-Mummiyya*. Below, Van Leo and camera

## Van Leo: Lighting the subject

Life and theatre. For half a century Van Leo has mixed the two

A young boy peers over the railings of a liner as it sails across the Bosphorus. It is some time in the early twenties. Istanbul, fading into the late afternoon light reflected from the sea, is no more substantial than a stage set. The city is a mere trick of the light. There is a smell of salt in the air. A lock of hair falls across the boy's forehead and... click, a picture.

But Van Leo is someone else, too. He is the son of Armenian parents and they are leaving Turkey to make a new life in Egypt. The First World War is almost certainly over, though to ask Van Leo his age would be less impertinent than unkind. And click, another kind of picture, though not one Van Leo would take.

Van Leo is not his only name, though it has been his name for almost half a century. Before he began taking pictures he was Leon Boyadjian. By 1941 his prints were signed Studio Angelo. Only in 1947 did Van Leo appear.

"You need," Van Leo told me, "to have your photograph taken at least once every ten years, just so that you know how you looked." It is a remarkable conceit from a man who takes pictures that do not even purport to show how you look. He pores over negatives, taken on the widest possible film — this, he says, he now has to import, depending on the kindness of friends arriving from Europe — recasting the images his camera has caught. Lines he does not like are removed, shadows accentuated. The print is cropped, parts of the body removed, consigned to oblivion. He is no caricaturist, no taker of snapshots. Nor should it be assumed that he is interested in capturing something of his subject. His photographs have nothing to do with documentation, save in the imposition of clear outlines. They have nothing to do with photo-journalism. They have everything to do with glamour. And Van Leo understands the nature of glamour. He knows that it is prefaced on the essential not-there-ness of the subject.

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There are articles on Van Leo in which attempts are made to define his quality as something that it is not. In this very paper his process of working was once described so: "To take possession of the light and the shadows and make them play on a face which only then would begin to give itself away... this dispossession of the self is the first prerequisite of an art which then reclaims the features of a face, the reflections of a buried soul."

Only in a Van Leo portrait nothing is given away. The face signifies nothing, and after Van Leo has got his hands on it can hardly be said even to resemble itself.

Van Leo does not view the face as the repository of anything so ineffable as the soul. He does not allow his portraits to harden into ideas. If they speak of anything it is of a thing as insubstantial as sensibility. They speak of a sensibility that the photographer's own.

Take his most widely known image. There is nothing human or even compassionate in Van Leo's image of Taha Hussein, celebrated humanitarian liberal; there is nothing ministerial in Van Leo's portrait of the one-time minister of education, nothing controversial in his portrait of Egypt's most famously banned writer. Van Leo's picture is, quite simply, theatrical. To say this is not to denigrate Van Leo's achievement. His after all, has become the most iconic representation of Hussein.

Van Leo still uses the camera his father bought him in 1941. It is a huge contraption, made of wood, brass and leather, out of which Van Leo has contrived to make a livelihood ever since. It is a career, of course, that has had its ups and downs. A one-time student at the American University in Cairo, he abandoned his studies to become an apprentice at Studio Venus in Qasr Al-Nil. During the early years of the Second World War he set himself up in his father's apartment, developing his photographs in the bath. By 1947 he was in a position to purchase Studio Metro, on Rue Fouad, from a "third rate Armenian photographer who after the war decided to go to the Soviet Union". From Studio Metro Van Leo worked deals with the Opera House, and with the large number of theatres then in existence. He would take photographs for their programmes in exchange for a little free advertising. And he has remained on Rue Fouad ever since, though the street has itself changed names.

"To be natural is such a very difficult pose to keep up." It is certainly a pose after which Van Leo has never strived. The photograph by himself that he likes most is of a South African dancer, Teddy Lane, who lived in Cairo during the 1940s. Lane's face is covered with vaseline and then coated with sand. The body of the dancer is absent — the face emerges from a black background, luminous and far from human.

Today a sitting with Van Leo can easily take more than three hours. There can be no hint of the spontaneous, and nothing is left to chance. For Teddy Lane it must have taken much, much longer, as vaseline and make up were applied, sand sprinkled across his face, his body concealed in a black bag with only a hole for the head.

Lane's portrait becomes the vehicle for Van Leo's own aestheticism. And it is an aestheticism that has less to do with the natural than it has with telling something about the subject. Van Leo measures the success of his photographs only in terms of artifice, of stylisation. Which is why Lane's picture is his favourite. Which is why Taha Hussein was such a perfect subject — the portrait was, Van Leo says, the result of only two poses. This is not surprising, for what better model could Van Leo want than a blind man who chooses always to wear dark glasses? What else could he want



from a model other than his not knowing what he looks like, let alone how he might wish to look?

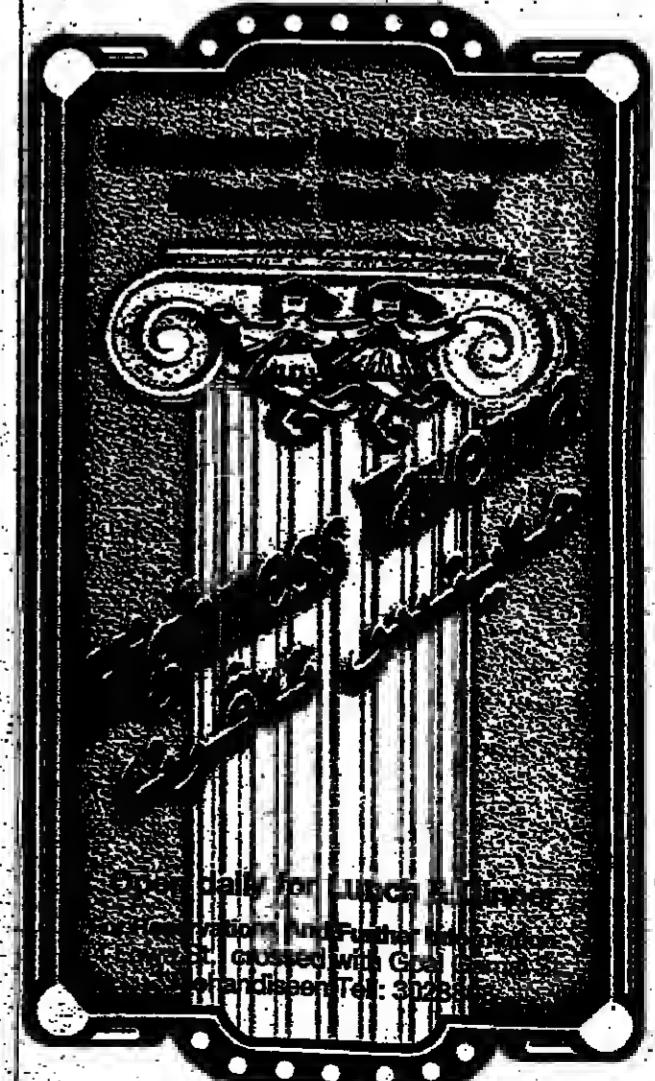
Van Leo is short and, to use an unfashionable word, dapper. He has the air of an aging courtesan. He is groomed according to the standards of another age. His manners are slightly precious. You would not dream of asking his age, you could not contemplate arguing with him. He is more than happy to show you the vast number of prints stored in one of several rooms. He would be less happy answering personal questions. Like his photographs, his manner brooks no inquiry. Surface is everything. To pry would be ill-mannered. He is, to use another old-fashioned term, shy.

Certain things he will tell. The entrance to his studio was designed by a close friend, André de Riz, a founding member of Art and Liberty, an association of surrealist artists. Indeed, Van Leo has himself been associated with the group, and one of the earliest analyses of his work was in Jacques Octavia's essay *Surrealisme de l'esprit*. It dealt with the extravagance, for artifice, for style. There is certainly no room for the boy a lock of whose hair has just fallen over his eyes as he peers over the railings of a liner that has just left Istanbul, taking him and his family to a new life. Van Leo... click, one picture.

A little silly, perhaps, he announces that colour film marked the death of the photograph. Ignor the melodrama and he is making a point — the great democracy of the ID card can produce nothing to match the best of his "portraits". The great democracy of the ID card lacks all glamour. It is too ordinary. There is no room for the extravagant, for artifice, for style. There is certainly no room for the boy a lock of whose hair has just fallen over his eyes as he peers over the railings of a liner that has just left Istanbul, taking him and his family to a new life. Van Leo... click, one picture.

Van Leo remains devoted to glamour, to black and white images of a perfect world. And he still takes portraits revealing not how his subjects appear but how, at some time, they might want to have appeared. He does not do colour portraits anymore.

Profile by Nigel Ryan



### Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

Out with the old year, dears, and in with the new. While most of us have probably tried, tried and tried again, and then given up on following our new year resolutions through, some of us are still very obviously still living the blur that was last Sunday night and Monday morning. Oh well. In the words of the legendary Eurovision Song Contest winner Johnny Logan, "What's another year?" For some, it's a time of renewal and revival; for others, it's just a hazy transition from one day to the next. But there's no doubt about it, dears. For all of us, it's at least three days of writing the wrong date, and then having to correct it. Happy new year, dears, and may all your wishes come true.

The family of the renowned Egyptian author Ihsan Abdell-Qudus recently met with famous presenter Tarek Habib to plan a series of lectures, organised by Tarek, as part of the distinguished author's literary salon. Staring off the series will be a cultural evening on the eleventh of the month which will discuss the influence of Abdell-Qudus on the modern Egyptian short story. And there's no doubt, dears, that there's lots to say on that subject.

Mohamed Salma's latest play, *I hear*, is really good. When I finally got round to seeing *Al-Gazir* at the Salem Theatre a few evenings ago, little did I

imagine that there would be an extra surprise in store. Just before the curtain rose, the cast, including Abdell-Moneim Madbouli, Magda El-Khatib, Wael Nour, along with playwright Mohamed Salma and director Galal El-Sharqawi came out onto the stage with a huge and delicious-looking cake. Judging by the blush on his face, it was obvious that the birthday boy was sweet Abdell-Moneim Madbouli himself. Both the cast and audience wished him a happy birthday (...and many more); and once the clapping and cheering had died down, we were treated to a great performance dealing with the rather weighty issues of militant terrorism and fundamentalism.